



The **Greatest**  
**Demon**  
Lord **IS REBORN AS A**  
**TYPICAL NOBODY**  
**Side Story**

The Wonderful Life  
of a **Typical Nobody**

**Myojin Katou**

Illustration by  
**Sao Mizuno**



# The Greatest Demon Lord IS REBORN AS A TYPICAL NOBODY

Side  
Story

The Wonderful Life  
of a Typical Nobody

Ard

Veronica

Nemesis

Lumi

Lami

Carmilla



In Her Living Quarters ■



Ireena

The Greatest  
**Demon**  
Lord **IS  
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**TYPICAL  
NOBODY**  
**Side Story**

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### **The Greatest Demon Lord Is Reborn as a Typical Nobody Side Story: The Wonderful Life of a Typical Nobody, Vol. 6.5**

**Myojin Katou**

Translation by Jessica Lange

Cover art by Sao Mizuno

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SHIJOU SAIKYOU NO DAIMAOU, MURABITO A NI TENSEI SURU  
IDEN MURABITO A NO KAREINARU HIBI

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Never Regret Evil If  
It Means Justice for  
Someone Else

The  
Demon Lord's  
Rescue Log:  
Courage  
Turned  
Cowardice

# The Demon Lord's Rescue Log: Courage Turned Cowardice

## Never Regret Evil If It Means Justice for Someone Else

Aside from the tiniest of countries, virtually all territories had areas that were geographically remote...and it wasn't unusual to find something almost haunting about them...

One such area was Evergrace, located in the south of the Laville Empire of Sorcery.

Ominous mist hung over Evergrace on any given day, and it crawled with monsters for reasons unknown. Any normal person knew to stay far away from this area, though it made the perfect spot for adventurers to grind, and many stepped up to the challenge.

All of this meant there was a long list of casualties. Even now, there was a group about to become another name on the list.

"Daaaaaammit!"

"Why is this happening to us...?!"

"I don't have much more magic left!"

Enough experience and confidence made adventurers a little too comfortable assuming the role of the hunter. They never imagined that they would become the hunted. That was exactly why adventurers often got their asses handed to them...causing some to lose everything.

"N-no...! I—I don't want to die here...! I've got a wife and daughter...!"

An army of drooling monsters loomed over them. The situation was dire. Only one fate awaited them, even if they tried to resist.

*We're all going to die.* They accepted their destiny, giving up hope...

"Someone seems to be in trouble."

A pleasant voice cut through the dense mist. A moment later—something detonated.

The monsters cornering the adventurers went up in flames, burning under a beam of light.

It was instantaneous. In seconds, the horde of beasts had become little more than charred remains strewn along the ground. With no idea what just happened, the adventurers were visibly shaken.

“That was close,” called out a melodious voice. A boy and girl stepped out from the mist.

They were stunning. The elven girl was beautiful, typical for her species...but the boy? He must have been human, but something about him was so bewitching, captivating all who chanced upon him.

As the adventurers gaped at him...the boy at the center of their gazes spoke to them.

“We’re on our way to Nephilim Village. Can we get there by traveling down this road?”

One of the adventurers timidly nodded before asking, “Wh-who in the world are you?”

“No one worth mentioning,” said the boy with a smile, turning to leave after bowing elegantly. The girl strolled by his side with light footsteps.

As they watched the two depart, one of the adventurers quietly broke the silence.

“Could those be...the children of our great heroes...?!”

“I-it’s gotta be them.”

“Ard and Ireena, if I remember correctly.”

“Rumor has it they saved some country and defeated the Frenzied King of Dragons...”

Did they just stumble across some people larger than life? They couldn’t mask their excitement, though one among them was relatively composed.

“For argument’s sake, let’s just say they are the children of our heroes. Why were they out here in the middle of nowhere? Aren’t they students? Y’know, at prep school?”

“...According to rumor, they’re part of an organization called the Queen’s Shadow.”

*The Queen’s Shadow.*

The alias of a covert group under the direct command of the queen. It was basically an urban legend. It wasn’t widely known, and even those familiar with the name didn’t think it actually existed. However...

“If students from a fancy school are coming out to the boonies for somethin’ besides extracurricular activities... We can narrow it down to one

possibility.”

“That they’re normal students who secretly work for the Queen’s Shadow?”

“I dunno what business they’ve got in that village, but...”

“I doubt we’ll ever run into ’em again.”

Those two were destined to go down in history. The adventurers continued to stare at Ard and Ireena until they disappeared into the fog.



Nephilim Village. An ancient, remote hamlet concealed in mist since days of yore.

There was a story about this land that its inhabitants called home...and it involved a repulsive long-standing tradition.

Beneath the mansion owned by the Orlands, the family that led the village, the ritual was playing out once again on this day.

“N-nghh...!”

“Ha-ha. You look like you’re in so much pain. Nice. Nice... Why don’t I gouge out that shoulder of yours next?”

A woman’s and a man’s voices bounced off the stone walls of a space lit in candlelight.

The man’s voice was coarse and crude, slightly shrill to match his hideous face, and he seemed drunk off the task at hand.

It was torture. The man was brutalizing the unresisting girl before him.

“Keh-keh-keh-keh-keh...! This is a very important part of the ceremony, my sister. You do realize your big brother doesn’t find any satisfaction in hurting you, right?”

His words were in stark opposition to his vulgar behavior. The son of the village leader, Vespa, had madness in his eyes. The whip in his hand spared no quarter. Each time he lashed the helpless girl—his little sister, Carmilla—he gave a disgusting chuckle.

“You should be honored, Carmilla. I’m so jealous of you.”

Blood dripped down her pale skin. Carmilla continued to accept the blows. Even as pliers and other instruments mangled her skin, her eyes housed no fear or despair. In fact, there was a sense of pride reflected in them.

Vespa kept tearing off her skin for a while longer before stopping.

“Let’s see. What next?” He turned to the side, examining the torture devices hanging on the cellar wall, and smirked. “Okay. This one.”

It was a long needle. He took it off the wall and then approached Carmilla, grabbing her slender arm.

“This is *really* going to hurt, but hang in there, Carmilla.”

“Yes...Brother...”

Vespa gripped the needle, aiming it for one of her fingernails...

“Some detestable hobby you have.”

A third party’s voice entered the room.

“Huh? Who the hell are—?” Vespa began to turn toward the direction of the voice...

“Whaaaaat do you think you’re doooooing?!”

Heavy footsteps followed the enraged scream. A moment later, a foot crunched into Vespa’s face, and his fleshy body went flying a few merels forward.

Then the person delivering the kick—Ireena—sprinted over to the wounded girl.

“Are you okay?! Y-you must be in so much pain! Don’t worry! Ard can heal these—”

“...Please...don’t...way...”

“Huh?” Ireena tilted her head.

Carmilla kept her gaze down for a few more seconds before looking up at Ireena.

“Please don’t get in our way...!” cried out the girl, radiating annoyance. “We’re...carrying out the will of the late Demon Lord...! We’ve been handed the duty...by an angel of sorts to...protect this world from those Evil Gods...! So I beg you not to interfere...!”

Ireena was bewildered by Carmilla’s hostility, but Ard remained calm.

“Didn’t we go over this earlier? This is a tradition passed down through the generations...and it’s considered a great honor to participate in it.”

Ard launched into the details of the village.

“Nephilim Village is where the Demon Lord sealed away an Evil God. Its inhabitants perform sacrificial ceremonies: Someone from the village elder’s family—from the Orland family—is chosen to replenish the magic in the seal keeping the Evil God at bay. It’s believed that, otherwise, the Evil God will

raise to prominence once again..." Ard finished his explanation and sighed. "I understand the gist of it. So what purpose does this torture serve?"

The question was directed at Vespa.

Ireena's kick must have really done a number on him, because he stayed on the ground, rubbing his face and moaning. He didn't intend on answering.

Carmilla spoke for him in a weak voice. "Our father taught us that I would make a better sacrifice if I experienced pain each day..."

"Yeah? Well, well, well... Must be part of the spell. I guess that nearly proves it."

No one could hear Ard whispering under his breath.

Carmilla couldn't have cared less about anything he had to say. After all, she had but her one goal.

"We're protecting the world. That's our duty. Please don't interfere."

"Sh-she's right!" Vespa shouted, echoing her after he finally stopped groaning. "S-scam!"

"Whazzat?!"

Vespa quickly shrunk in on himself when Ireena power-flexed.

"Eek! Wh-what do you want?! Wh-what are you doing here?! M-my dad won't excuse this type of behavior!" shouted Vespa fearfully.

Ard seemed serene. "I'm Ard Meteor. And this is Ireena Olhyde, the daughter of a baron. I'm an average student attending school in the royal capital...but on occasion, the queen hoists the most unreasonable demands on us. That's why we're here today."

"A-an order from the queen...?! N-no one told me about this!"

"Maybe not, but your father should know. He's agreed to let us reside in the village until the ceremony is over and act as we please."

"Nnnnngh...! B-but...Dad never said you could interrupt us, I bet! I mean, this is part of the ceremony!"

"...Well, that's true." Ard frowned.

"Then get out! You're in our way! And take the madwoman with you—"

"Who are *you* calling a madwoman?!"

A foot landed square on Vespa's face. Blood sprayed from his nose.

Ireena looked ready to come at him again as he toppled to the ground for a second time, but Ard grabbed her by the shoulder.

"Leave him be, Ireena. Like he said, we're in the way. Let's go."

"B-but...!" Ireena looked at Carmilla and hesitated.

The other girl refused to say what Ireena was hoping to hear. In fact, Carmilla glared at Ireena, who bowed her head in dejection and silently left the room with Ard.

*“Hah. Hah. W-well, let’s pick up where we left off.”*

*“Yes...Brother...”*

In the cellar unfolded a scene that would make anyone want to avert their eyes—



The hallway of the underground cellar was dark. On the other side of the door, they could hear the glee in the voice of a foul man and a young girl in distress.

*“...Ngh! I can’t stand it...!”* Ireena shouted, closing her fingers to make a tight fist and gritting her teeth. Tears pooled in her doe eyes, anger visible. It was difficult for someone with such a savior complex and a heart so pure to accept this tradition.

*“...That’s why I suggested it would be best if you didn’t accompany me.”*

She didn’t respond. After a while, she looked at him imploringly.

*“Isn’t there anything we can do...?”*

Ireena wanted him to fix the situation—to save that poor girl.

Ard responded with a smile. *“Ireena. That’s why I’m here.”*



The session—torture borne by the sacrificial lamb—came to an end.

*“Good work today. We’ll pick this up tomorrow.”* Her half brother—born from a different mother—smirked and left the cellar.

As if to replace him, her female attendants filed into the room. Each held a small box containing bandages, potions, and other healing items.

*“We will tend to you, Lady Carmilla.”*

*“Okay... Thank you for doing this every day...”*

They slathered salves on her wounds before bandaging them. These moments were accompanied by shooting pain, but Carmilla was resigned to her duty as the sacrifice.

After the maids treated her, they escorted her back to her room. She might be tortured on the daily, but that didn’t mean she was of low status. In fact,

she was one of the biggest names in the village and treated with great respect.

Carmilla was set up in a larger room than the village leader—Germann Orland—himself, and it was decorated expensively. Ever since she'd become the sacrifice, she was waited on hand and foot, whether she liked it or not. She believed this was her family's way of expressing love; Carmilla knew her father and brother adored her.

So this didn't torment her. Even the physical pain that almost made her pass out every day was something that made her proud.

".....*Phew.*" She collapsed on the bed and moaned into the perfect softness. "Three more days."

Three more days until the ceremony. Then Carmilla would fulfill her role. She would protect this world. To that end, she was willing to offer up her life.

She wasn't going to die. In fact, her life would finally start.

"Soon... I'll be able to see you, Mother..." Like a daydreaming maiden, Carmilla blushed.

"You'll see your mother?"

A voice came out of nowhere. When she turned to face its source! Carmilla saw Ard Meteor. The slender man stood before her with grace, which enhanced his beauty and gave him an aristocratic air.

At the end of the day, Carmilla was just an innocent young girl. A handsome face would be her undoing. Hence why she didn't call for help, even with an unfamiliar man in her room.

"...You show up in the most unexpected places. Like a phantom. Or a god."

Ard Meteor didn't respond to that. Instead, he repeated himself. "What do you mean, you'll be able to see your mother?"

She knew this wasn't a topic to be broached with a boy she hardly knew, but Ard Meteor was just so mysterious, and...she found herself desperately wanting to answer his question.

*Is this love?*

She had a feeling it was something else.

...At any rate, Carmilla responded, "My mother...was also a sacrifice..."

"I know. Germann's third wife, if I remember. She was offered soon after you were born."

"That's right... I didn't get to spend much time with her...but I love her."

If she had stopped talking then, this might have been a moving tale, but

her next words would make anyone spiral into madness.

“That’s why...I want to hurry things along and sacrifice myself... If I do, I can see Mother again... Sacrifices live happily forever inside the seal... I’m so excited... I wonder what we’ll talk about...and what we’ll do...”

This was what her father told her. Becoming the sacrifice was more than just an honor; she’d be granted eternal bliss with her mother.

“...I see. I understand perfectly now.”

So why did Ard Meteor look somehow melancholy? Carmilla didn’t have a clue.

*I mean, look at me. I’m so blessed.*



Three days passed. A mist once again cloaked Nephilim Village. It was morning, but the overcast sky blocked out the sun, and the dense fog made things look dim enough to dampen anyone’s mood... The eyes of the villagers, however, were frenzied. They lined up on either side of the main road cutting through the village and arranged themselves on a flower-lined path.

Walking down the procession was the sacrifice, Carmilla. Her luxurious robe, heavy ornamentation, and natural grace brought out her beauty. She was like a bride on her wedding day.

Carmilla blushed slightly and progressed toward the plaza with a glimmer of anticipation in her eyes. Vespa watched from the sidelines, thinking to himself.

*Ah... What a shame. If this wasn’t the final ceremony, Carmilla would have been my bride.*

To fulfill a certain objective, incest had been committed by the Orlands for generations. Carmilla’s mother was their father’s younger sister.

*Oh... If only my sister were all mine...!* Impure emotions were the source of his yearning for Carmilla, but he would never be able to put his desires first.

After all, Vespa lived a miserable existence, just another family member brainwashed by tradition. The sacrifice was the priority here. And now...he had to perform a critical duty. Vespa glanced beside him...toward Ard

Meteor and Ireena Litz de Olhyde. The young man observed Carmilla approach the plaza, but...the girl seemed rather down.

*That's strange. I was sure she'd cause a scene.*

Vespa wasn't completely convinced, but he pushed the thought from his mind out of ignorance. At any rate, he had to focus on the task at hand. Everything else would sort itself out.

Carmilla arrived at the plaza—a large open space. A special-class circle was drawn, lines stretched over the ground and glowing a poisonous purple.

Next to her was her father, Gelmann—a revolting middle-aged man who closely resembled his son. He glanced at Vespa. This was their signal.

“All right! Pass out the cursed liquor!” Vespa ordered a servant standing at attention nearby.

Cursed liquor was a magic item that temporarily boosted the magic of its drinker. The ceremony would be complete when each member of the village transferred magic into the circle, which was why all participants were made to drink it.

The magic item was passed among the villagers, and...

“Y-you have some, too.”

Next in line were Ireena and Ard.

“Y-you can observe, but i-if you're going to be here, you have to drink.”

In actuality, there was no such obligation, but it would pose problems if they didn't. Vespa was being quite insistent.

“Hmm. Very well.” Ard stared at the glass of liquor in his hands and narrowed his eyes.

*Don't tell me...this guy noticed...?! Vespa broke out in a sweat. What kind of beating would his father give him if he couldn't get Ard to drink this? He didn't even want to think about it.*

“This does seem strong. I should be fine, but it won't be good for Ireena's body. I hope you'll allow that I'm the only one to consume it.”

“Yeah, I'm a bit of a lightweight.”

*Oh. That's the reason?* Vespa relaxed. His job was to get Ard to drink. He didn't care about Ireena.

Vespa offered an amiable smile. “I-it's no problem. W-well, bottoms up.”

He urged Ard—and without the slightest bit of hesitation, Ard Meteor downed the cursed liquor.

A moment later...

“...!” Ard crumpled to the ground.

Vespa broke into a huge grin. “Hee-hee! Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee! I got you good! Serves you right, idiot!”

With volcanic emotion, Vespa whipped out a small dagger from his breast pocket—and mercilessly speared Ard Meteor in the chest.



As the ceremony proceeded, Carmilla started to sense something heavy hanging in the air. Did something happen behind her? Curious, she turned her head to look, and—

“My daughter. Focus on the ceremony before you. What could be more important?”

Just as Carmilla was about to glance behind her, the gravity of her father’s voice stung her heart like a whip.

He was right. What could possibly be more important? From this point forward, she would become a cornerstone of peace and achieve eternal happiness.

She would join her beloved mother.

*“Open. Open. With the thunderous applause of the mortal body. Open, Gate.”*

Her father chanted the spell. His expression held a mad frenzy. He had a sense of duty to protect the world. Carmilla accepted and questioned it no further.

...As the chanting concluded, the special-class circle on the ground grew noticeably brighter. An instant later, something slowly emerged from within it.

A dusky boulder of mass. Indescribably disgusting, like all evil in the world had been rolled into one. It eventually transformed into a skull that stared at Carmilla.

“Eek...!” Fear seized her heart.

Gelmann held his daughter’s frail shoulders tight. “Go on, Carmilla. Approach it. If you do...all your dreams will come true.”

She gasped. “Mother...!”

Carmilla balled her hands into fists and fought off her terror, stepping forward with confidence and heading straight toward the disturbing skull.

*Now my dream will come true*, she told herself with conviction.

...Perhaps the thing sensed the sincerity of her wish. *Grah-grah*, poured from its mouth like laughter...

As Carmilla sensed the threatening air...semiclear white smoke began to curl up from the surface of the black skull. Not just one or two strands; misty streams jetted out of it as if trying to escape.

Finally...the white mist shifted into humanoid chests and heads.

*"Help meeeeeeeeeeeeeee."*

*"It hurts! It hurts! It hurts!"*

*"I can't take it anymore!"*

Set free from the fog was an unbearable onslaught of agony, all desperate to escape the skull, but they could stretch no farther away than their upper bodies. This sight alone was shocking, but...then Carmilla spotted someone among the ghastly figures.

"Mother...?!" Carmilla cried out involuntary.

The woman had the same golden hair as Carmilla, and there was a nostalgic air about her. Her beauty, however, was masked by agony and sorrow, expression horribly tragic.

"What is this...?!" Her eyes went wide, unable to process the situation.

Her father called out behind her. "My daughter. I ask for your forgiveness," Gelmann said in a heartfelt, apologetic tone. "I've never liked lying. But to fulfill my duty, I must bend my morals. And so I kept stretching the truth."

"You lied to me...?!"

"That's correct, Carmilla. I lied to you twice. The first was when I told you that we seal away the Evil God for the good of humanity. We're not lower life-forms like humans. We're demons...and we've been steadily weakening the seal of our master."

Carmilla froze in shock, but her father paid no mind to her state.

"Among the demons, the Orlands are of high noble ranking. After all, our family is the offspring of our supreme master. That's why we have married within the bloodline for generations—to prevent our blood from diluting." Her father's face was as ugly as a frog, and he gave a disgusting smile. "Legend in our family states that we will save our master. Souls are required to break the seal. That's where we come in. Our family—with our master's blood coursing through our bodies—provides ideal human sacrifices."

Gelmann spoke with pride, but his shoulders slumped after a beat, and his smile darkened. “But I digress. I’m supposed to apologize... Let me confess my second lie. You see, Carmilla, I said becoming a sacrifice would bring you happiness...but that isn’t true.”

“...What?” Her mind went blank.

Carmilla’s father cared little for her feelings. “When I said you’ll meet your mother by becoming a sacrifice, I was not lying. However...”

Her father was ready to reveal the truth.

“Anything beyond that is false.”

All her convictions, all that kept her heart going, all her hopes...were dashed instantly.

“Those offered to our master are not granted eternal happiness... They experience a perpetual hell.”

...She had no words. Carmilla felt like she had slipped out of her body. She couldn’t form a single thought, not even about the sort of expression that she was making.

“Ah, Carmilla... I’m sorry, Carmilla... I’ve lied to my family once again. I’ve brought sorrow to those I love. Ah, but...”

As Gelmann hung his head, he began to tremble. His face shot up toward the sky.

“It feels so incrediblille! I hate lying—but there’s just nothing better than the look of those on the brink of despair! This is why I can never stop doing thiiiiiiis!”

But in that very next instant...a tentacle shot out from the skull’s eye socket and twisted around her leg.

“Ah!”

It dragged her along the ground. The tentacle was slowly shrinking back inside...and the skull’s open mouth was waiting at the end to devour her. Almost ironically, the horrendous sight that was about to swallow her brought Carmilla back to her senses.

“N-nooooo!” Carmilla thrashed her upper body in desperation, half wild with fear.

Her nails clawed at the ground, and she frantically struggled to escape the thing. But it was useless. The tentacle dragged her delicate body toward its mouth.

She was helpless. No one could stop it. No one could save her. Though

she understood this...Carmilla couldn't stop herself from screaming.

"Someone help me...!"

As if mocking her screams, the skull let out a *grah-grah*. Carmilla's body approached its gaping maw—

"You have no idea how to treat a lady."

A placid voice cut through the air, and the very next instant...the black skull in front of her was washed out by a bright flash of light and heat.

There was an explosion, and a torrent of energy enveloped Carmilla. However, oddly enough, the scorching flames caused no harm—only the tentacle wrapped around her slender leg was burned away.

"Aaaah!" Carmilla fell back onto the ground.

*Ow! What happened?* Just as she thought this...

"E-eeeeeeeeeeeeeeek!"

A piglike squeal rang out. Hurried footsteps followed.

It was her older brother, Vespa. His face twisted into an ugly mask of fear as he raced over to his father and clung to him, but...

"You idiot! You failed!"

"Gah?!"

Gelmann knocked his son to the ground. Tears welled in Vespa's eyes as he rubbed his stinging cheek.

"I—I did everything I was supposed to! I—I thought the murder was successful! B-but the dead are aliiiiive!" Vespa shouted in despair, jerking his finger at someone.

In front of him was Ard Meteor, smiling with a bright-red stain on his chest.

"I did exactly what you said, Dad! I made him drink the poisoned liquor! I stabbed him in the heart! B-but...he's still alive!"

His teeth clattering together, Vespa was the personification of terror.

Ard chuckled. "No, no, I died. However..." His crimson eyes blazed. "You can't destroy this body by killing me once."

His lips curled up like a half-moon. It was bone-chilling. Anyone would freeze like a frog under the sharp gaze of a snake.

Ard Meteor continued eloquently, "The fact is, I sensed this might be the case when the queen briefed me. I thought there was a possibility that you might be good people who were being tricked. That was why I allowed you to do as you pleased to ascertain whether you were good or evil. All that to

say...”

Ard Meteor cut himself off there, and his dreadful smile intensified.

“I can now punish you without holding back.”

Another blast detonated. The villagers lining the path to the plaza were assaulted by light, then sent flying in every direction.

“The people of the village are all demons—but fear not. I do not take the lives of the insignificant, except...”

After all the demons were wiped out, Ard Meteor pointed at Gelmann and Vespa in declaration.

“Deceiving an innocent girl, harming her, and sending her into the depths of despair is a heavy crime. One that I will duly punish.”

The boy’s crimson eyes pierced through the two men. Vespa couldn’t hold back his screams. As Gelmann’s forehead broke out in a sweat, he clenched his fists and said...

“This isn’t over yet...! As long as...! As long as I offer up the sacrifice!”

He looked at Carmilla in a way only a man at the end of his rope could. He began to race toward her, but...

“As if! You think I’ll let you?!” Flames shot out from the sidelines.

“Ngh?!” Gelmann dodged them, nearly avoiding disaster. However, in that moment of weakness...

“We’re gonna crush your plan!”

It was Ireena Litz de Olhyde. Silver hair fluttering behind her, the elven girl rushed forward and embraced Carmilla, sprinting off with the delicate girl in her arms before settling next to Ard.

“Checkmate. Cease resisting. It’s futile,” Ard Meteor stated.

Gelmann gritted his teeth. The man was on the verge of total failure, yet his expression said he refused to accept it. He screamed at Ard with bloodshot eyes.

“Y-you’re dirty, pathetic—a lower life-form! How dare you call our master an Evil God, look down upon them, and shamelessly strut upon this earth?! Even *you* once thrived under the rule of our master!”

“...Thrived? Tell me you’re joking. In the glory days of the Evil Gods, humanity was enslaved by demons, and we were no more than toys to them. How many tears did humans shed? How much suffering did we endure?”

“That...was humanity in its finest hour! Living as our slaves and dying like dirty dishrags! That’s what humanity is meant to be! It’s this world’s

destiny!!”

“...Dear me. Demons are always the same. Millennia may pass, and you never change,” Ard murmured with a sigh.

Gelmann didn't hear him. He was completely off in his own world, and a tinge of madness slowly began to creep into his expression.

“Our supreme masters reign at the pinnacle, and demons support them from below! We use humanity for the advancement of civilization! If it's to create an ideal world, these lives won't be wasted!” Gelmann approached Vespa and grabbed him by the nape of the neck. “Our work remains unfinished! The Orlands wish to revive our master! And I will fulfill that duty!”

Something ominous flashed in Gelmann's eyes, which darted from side to side, as he ran, dragging Vespa behind him.

“D-Dad?! Wh-what are you doing?!”

“Offering ourselves to our master!”

“What?!”

“We haven't prepared like Carmilla! Our souls aren't good enough on our own! But it's better than nothing!”

“H-hold on! N-no! I don't want to be a sacrificiiiice!”

Gelmann pressed forward, forcing Vespa—kicking and screaming—to join him.

“I won't allow that.” Ard wasn't about to let this happen. He cast a magic attack without chanting. A circle manifested before him, crackling with purple lightning.

Just as the attack was about to strike Gelmann from behind...black tentacles once again shot out of the skull's eye socket and fully wrapped around Gelmann and Vespa. The lightning was obstructed and scattered in all directions after failing to fulfill its purpose.

“For our master! For the second cooooooming!”

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

The skull swallowed up the screaming pair.

“...Now we have more problems.” Ard gave a weary sigh.

Next to him, Ireena still clung on to Carmilla... The trio looked upon the ghastly scene. The misty white tendrils of sacrificed souls vanished, sucked back into the skull. Voices cried out in agony. The figure of Carmilla's mother was among them...

Before Carmilla could spare a thought for her mother's tragedy—the skull began to generate flesh. As if turning back time, the skull started to revert to a human form...though it stopped when red skin stretched over its face, eyeballs rolling inside its sockets.

*“AH-GAH-GAH-GAH. GAH-GEG-GAH, OH-GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”*

Now a looming face with visible muscles and sinew, the horrific monster let out a roar.

It was here that Carmilla broke out in a sweat.

“So the Evil God has revived in an incomplete form, huh.” Ard Meteor looked at Ireena and Carmilla, seemingly fine. “Please step back as far as possible.”

“Okay! Go get 'em, Ard!” Ireena beamed at him.

He turned his back on them, striding forward—straight toward the monstrosity.

*“GAH-GAH-GAH-GAH! GAH! GAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”*

The beast let out a scream. It seemed to hold a grudge against Ard.

“...You used to pride yourself on your beauty. Look at you now. Hmph, pathetic. I guess it's fitting, in a way, considering your true nature.”

Ard spoke to the monster...but neither Ireena nor Carmilla could hear him.

“As long as I'm around, I won't let you do as you please,” Ard said. “I'll protect this world...in the Champion's stead.”

Verbal shots fired. The battle began—

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—It didn't take long, though it seemed to last an eternity to the spectators.

Ard Meteor was the one in control of this death match.

The incomplete form of the resurrected Evil God—in all its repulsive glory—was engulfed by Ard's barrage of magic. If not a trace was left behind...Carmilla's heart would have been at ease. A white mass of souls, however, appeared where the Evil God once stood...then broke into individual spirits ascending into the heavens.

They were the poor souls sacrificed and trapped within the Evil God. Each one had a look of sweet release upon their face...

Carmilla spotted someone. “Mother!”

She squirmed out of Ireena’s arms and dropped to the ground before dashing ahead. The girl reached out for her mother’s soul, now rising into the sky.

“Wait! Please...don’t leave me!”

Her mother responded to Carmilla’s anguished cry. She had a look of sorrow coloring her face—even though all she wanted was to joyfully reunite with her daughter and hold her in her arms. But she knew it was impossible. She struggled to reach for her daughter’s outstretched hand, but she couldn’t defy the laws of earth that pulled her away.

The dead were sent to the other side. That was unnegotiable.

“Carmilla...!” All she could do was call out her daughter’s name before vanishing.

“Ah...” In utter despair, Carmilla fell back as the truth hit her. She looked up at the sky as if in search of her mother’s shadow. That was the only thing she could do.

“...Carmilla.”

A boy called out next to her. Ard Meteor.

She faced him and spoke partly out of impulse. “...Kill me.”

He said nothing.

Was he shocked? Or did his expression signify something else?

It didn’t matter. Nothing did anymore.

Carmilla spilled her heart to him. “Please, kill me. I don’t want to live.”

“...I can’t do that.”

Carmilla’s lips trembled, and she glared at him. “Why? Why do you think I should keep living? After all that I’ve lost? What’s there to live for? ...I believed I was born as a sacrifice to protect the world. But this is my reality. I’m not even human... So what’s the reason for someone like me to keep living in this world?!”

It was the first time she’d ever lost control of her emotions. Anger, misery, and sorrow streamed out of her—but Ard Meteor refused to comply with her wish.

“...Carmilla. It’s unfortunate that you couldn’t speak with your mother. I bet she would tell you to live if you could. She would have said she wants you to lead a happy life.”

“How...?! How would *you* know?!” Tears pooled in Carmilla’s eyes as

she lashed out in anger. Existing in this world for a second longer felt unbearable. If this boy wouldn't do her the favor, maybe she could bite off her own tongue.

Just as this thought crossed her mind...

"Okay, Carmilla. Let's confirm what your mother thinks."

"...What?" She couldn't understand what he was saying. It only added to her confused state.

In that next instant...a large magic circle unfurled beneath her feet. It wasn't just Carmilla—golden circles opened out under Ard and Ireena, too.

For just a moment, the circles glowed noticeably brighter, then—

"Since you couldn't grab hold of her hand, we'll visit a place where you still can."

As soon as Carmilla heard Ard, everything around her changed. Her surroundings shifted from a destroyed village to a mysterious space—a dark-red background like blood stretched on forever. White souls soared through the disquieting atmosphere.

"I-is this...?!"

"The other side. Well, just a section of it...but your mother is here... I would have liked to resurrect her, but I'm afraid that's impossible. You'll be able to talk to her, though."

Ard raised his left hand. Another magic circle opened up in front of his palm...and a few seconds later, a single white soul came forward. Carmilla was immediately paralyzed with fear.

"Mother...?!" Carmilla asked on instinct.

As if to respond...the spirit took on the form of her mother.

"Carmilla...!"

"M-Mother!"

She flew toward her mother's arms, but souls had no physical bodies, so they were unable to touch each other...and Carmilla's petite frame passed right through her. It felt like her heart was getting gorged out from the pain—

"Mother...! I can't take it anymore...! I want to be with you...! I want to die...!"

Carmilla's eyes overflowed with tears, and her mother looked pained for a moment before adopting a stern expression.

"I won't allow it. If you kill yourself, I'll disown you."

"What...?!" Carmilla felt like she'd been pushed off a cliff.

As she stood there in mute astonishment, her mother continued, face severe. "I understand how you feel... I felt the same way. That's exactly why...I want you to find true happiness. I want you to be happy and take pride in your life. After all..."

Her mother's face softened into a smile. "You're my beloved daughter."

Carmilla couldn't stop herself from crying. Tears fell of their own accord.

"...I'm afraid we're out of time," Ard announced, and her mother's smile disappeared.

They were back in the ruined village.

"...Well, Carmilla? What will you do? If you choose death against your mother's wishes, I vow that I will deliver you to the other side with a painless end."

His tone was fluid and cold. If she chose death here, he would assist her with no qualms.

...The truth was, she didn't know what to do. Her voice seemed to shake.

"Living in this world...is a non-option... I'm a demon... I'll never be able to live a full life... Besides, I'll have to live it...all alone."

"No. You won't be by yourself," Ard argued.

Next to him, Ireena puffed out her chest and chimed in, "That's right! You won't be alone! You'll have us!" She offered an innocent smile lacking any uncertainty, selfishness, or hostility.

"But I'm...a demon...!"

"Who cares? Y'know, I... I'm a descendent of the Evil Gods! In a way, I'm just like you!"

It must have taken a great deal of courage for Ireena to make her confession. Revealing her secret was proof that she would do everything in her power to save Carmilla.

Ard Meteor felt the same way.

"Carmilla, you asked what point there was in living... Let's search for that answer. Together."

He held out his hand. Carmilla's lips trembled as she stared at it. Her mother's voice echoed in her mind.

*"I want you to find true happiness. I want you to be happy and take pride in your life. After all... You're my beloved daughter."*

Carmilla closed her eyes. *Mother, I...*

It would probably be easier to choose death now, but she'd never be able

to face her mother if she did.

All people were destined to die and arrive in the afterlife. Carmilla didn't know if she'd be able to meet her mother there. But if they did reunite, she wanted to tell her something with her head held high.



She wanted to tell her mother that she'd had a happy life.

And that might just save her mother, too—liberate the woman who had been tricked into living and dying as a sacrifice.

Carmilla had one choice to make...

"...I'll do my best for the time being."

She took the hand held out to her. Housed in her eyes were sorrow and resolve.

Maybe that was why...the corners of Ard Meteor's mouth turned upward.

It was a smile brimming with as much love and compassion as a holy mother—



**A Myth-Killing Legend Is  
Made in a Day**

**Dues to the  
Demon Lord  
Reborn:  
The Tale of  
a God Slayer**

# Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: The Tale of a God Slayer

## A Myth-Killing Legend Is Made in a Day

*BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!*

...A peaceful afternoon.

Following several hours of alchemy practice, the students filed into the cafeteria to fill their empty stomachs. They looked satiated and visibly relaxed as they enjoyed their lunches.

...Until something exploded, a boom ringing in their ears.

Some of the students assumed this was a demon attack and went on high alert...but most looked fed up, silently groaning *not again*.

Those flat stares—me, Ireena, and Ginny included—centered on one student in particular—our resident troublemaker, Sylphy.

“Oh? Someone set off another magic trap—,” Sylphy announced, not only with zero shame but with a look of pride—

“SYLPHYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!! WHERE IS THAT IDIOT?!”

Olivia sounded absolutely furious. She burst into the cafeteria in an ogre-like rage an instant later.

“Fouuuuund youuuuu!”

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

The fur of Olivia’s therianthrope ears and tail stood on end as she pounced on Sylphy, grabbed her by the back of the neck, and began to drag her away.

“H-heeeeeeeelp meee! Someooooone!” Voice echoing, Sylphy disappeared with Olivia.

“...Should we?” Ireena asked.

“She’s brought this on herself.”

Ginny had a point, but abandoning her felt like a lousy thing to do. We followed the pair.

Olivia had made her way toward the food storage room inside the school. Preserved rations were distributed in the event of earthquakes and other unforeseen disasters.

...Smoke was billowing from the room.

A crowd of onlookers had gathered, and their reactions ran the gamut. Cutting past the throng, Olivia pushed her way into the storage room and finally released Sylphy.

“Hey, idiot. I imagine you know what’s happening here.”

“O-of course. My magic trap went off—”

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why would you set a magic trap *inside* the storage room?”

“M-my supersharp sixth sense told me the Academy was in danger, so I laid more traps than usual not too long ago. I was just thinking of the school. I—I wasn’t trying to hurt anyone. With the selfless sacrifice of some potatoes, the Academy is safe once again—”

“You haven’t protected shit, dumbass!” Olivia’s fist slammed against Sylphy’s head. *Thunk!*

“Aaaaaaaaah! You split my skull! You split it in half!” Sylphy clutched her head, writhing in pain on the ground.

Olivia looked down at the girl in tears, expression as merciless as ever. “It’s all your fault...! Now my precious dried sweet potatoes—made with love—have burned to a criiiisp! How are you going to make it up to me? These serve no use to me anymore!”

“Well, n-no! The ashes can be used to filter the sewers, disinfect wounds, and lots of other stuff. They’re not worthle— Gah?!”

Sylphy fell to the ground in a stupor as another giant fist came crashing down on her head. Olivia stood over the girl imperiously as her victim let out a silent scream.

“This is the eighth time that my potatoes have fallen victim to your schemes! The eighth! Two more times and we’ll have to celebrate the ten-mark milestone!”

The rage was messing with her head. Olivia was definitely in one of her moods.

“You’ve said your last sorry! Prepare for a full-course beatdown from hell!”

“Eeeeeeeeeek?! Wh-what did I do?!”

Sylphy was full-on sobbing, tears streaming from her eyes like a waterfall. She looked straight at me, silently begging me for help. I sighed, already exhausted.

“Fiiine... Lady Olivia, please calm down. Can we call it even if we return your charred sweet potatoes to their original state?”

“Excuse you?!” Her threatening tone and savage eyes turned to me, but I walked straight past Olivia and approached the dried sweet potatoes.

...Hmm. They really were burned to nothing. Not that it posed any problems.

It took me a split second to do some alchemy. A magic circle manifested before me and traveled through the sweet potatoes (in their barely-there state). Then—

“What?!”

“Th-the burned potatoes...!”

“...L-look fresh out of the oven!”

The onlookers were right. But this was strange. Why were they acting so surprised? This was no big—

“Ha-ha-ha-ha! I guess I should thank you, Ard Meteor!” Olivia patted my shoulder with a dazzling smile.

...In her case, a smile wasn’t a sign of friendship. In fact, it was the opposite. I broke out in a sweat and tried to get away from her as fast as possible, but Olivia squeezed my arm tightly and foiled my escape.

“You’re one crazy guy. I thought Lost Skills were long done and gone, but here you are, using them like nothing.”

“A-a Lost Skill...?! Are you talking about the spell I just used?!”

No way. That didn’t seem right.

“Th-there were remnants of the original potato left behind! If I used those to reconstruct the dried sweet potatoes, that isn’t a big deal, wouldn’t you say?!”

My shouting caused a commotion among the crowd.

“H-he thinks that’s nothing...?”

“I knew it; the guy’s a powerhouse...”

There was a mixed response of discomfort and praise. Ireena and Ginny stuck their chests out proudly.

“Hee-hee! That’s my Ard!”

“*Our* Ard, indeed.”

The two were fuming.

...The students, restless. Ireena and Ginny, locked in a glaring contest. Sylphy, breathing a sigh of relief after her close brush with death. And...

“Why don’t we have a nice long talk in the staff room? *Mr. Ard?*”

Olivia’s blinding smile told me that I couldn’t turn it down.

...My heart was screaming bloody murder.

*Why do these things always happen?!*



...I, Ard Meteor, have a troublesome past.

In my old world—that is, thousands of years ago, in ancient times—I was feared as the Demon Lord. People were absolutely terrified of me, and my subordinates projectile vomited whenever I tried to speak to them. I wanted to be friends, but I was largely misunderstood...and ended up haunted by my own loneliness. Fed up with the situation, I reincarnated into the future without telling the former Heavenly Kings or other important people. I started a new life, spending my days doing my best to make one hundred friends. That was my goal.

...All this to say, I reunited with Olivia—an old Heavenly King and a sister figure—at the Academy, which I was attending to make friends. She was totally suspicious that I was the Demon Lord, and certain reasons demanded that I make sure she *never, ever* found out.

With that in mind, I fervently explained myself once we stepped into the staff room and somehow managed to dispel her suspicions that I was the Demon Lord.

I thought I’d get to relish in my victory now. However...

“Hold on. I’ve got something else to talk about with you guys.”

I wasn’t the only one in the staff room; Ireena and Ginny were with us, too. They had tagged along. *Wherever he goes, we go*, they seemed to say.

Sylphy would normally be part of the group, but she was currently paying for the earlier incident and repairing the damaged food storehouse.

“...‘Something else’?” I asked meekly.

Olivia crossed her arms, sullen as usual. “Yeah. As you know, our school

has an underground dungeon that we use for classes. And there's been...a number of disappearances down there lately."

"Ah. Do you mean the rumor about people vanishing without a trace?" Ginny asked.

Olivia nodded. "Yeah. I know the students jokingly call it the Terror House. I wouldn't be too concerned if this were a spooky campfire story."

I'd heard about this. Legend had it, those who ventured into a certain room on the third floor of the underground dungeon were transported into a different dimension. This seemed to be the rumor of choice lately. I brushed it off as a spooky story and didn't pay it much attention. I couldn't believe it was actually happening.

"Three students have already gone missing. I don't know if the rumors are true, but there's *something* going on in the dungeon... As the instructor, I should be the one looking into it, but my schedule is absolutely packed."

"So you're passing the torch to us?"

Olivia nodded, and I prepared to accept her request...but before I could—

"...Ireena, is something wrong? You've gone pale."

"Huh? Th-th-th-th-that's n-not t-t-t-true!"

I'd never seen such a face on her. *Where's all this coming from?* I tilted my head.

Ginny broke into a smug smile. "Hmm? Miss Ireena? Don't tell me you're scared!"

Her smile and mocking tone must have done a number on Ireena's ego.

"Wh-what?! N-never! Apparitions don't give me the heebie-jeebies! They're just stories!"

Apparitions? I guess there was word that a student who died in the dungeon was haunting the place, snatching the missing people. So Ireena isn't a fan of the supernatural.

"I-I'll do it!" Ireena declared nonetheless. "Ard and I will solve this case in three seconds!"

Ginny's challenge was effective, it seemed. Ireena was raring to go.

And so the three of us would head down into the dungeon to uncover the secrets of the Academy and solve this mystery.



After classes finished for the day, we hurried to the school's underground dungeon. The disappearances were happening on the third level, but we stumbled across nothing on our way there. It was like we were taking an afternoon stroll.

"Well...we're here. This is our destination."

All dungeons had the same basic construction, though there were some exceptions. They were designed to have a series of wide hallways and rooms made of stone. The one at our academy was no different. The site of the incident—the Terror House—was just some room, no frills or tricks in sight.

...Yeah, it was really normal. In fact, that's what was so unusual about it.

"What's the matter, Ard?" Ginny asked. "You look confused."

"...I just assumed the cause of the attacks might be demons infiltrating the inside of the dungeon."

"Ah, me too. I thought the demons could be involved and wondered if they might use the dungeon for a ceremony like the one they attempted after kidnapping Miss Ireena."

"That was my guess, too. However..." I murmured, putting my hand to my chin and looking around the room. "I don't sense anything strange here. There's no magical response from demons, humans, or any other race. Levels of mana aren't especially high here, either."

"Um... Soooo that means?"

"That means...I don't think the students were taken by some spirit. The suspect is not demon, human, or anything in between. If someone did something here, magic residue would have been left behind. Both people and demons are creatures who release magic unconsciously. I assumed that if we followed its trail, it would lead us to the perpetrator."

But there were no traces of magic. Far from it, in fact; I wasn't picking up any magic at all. In other words, no one had been here for a long time. This included potential suspects and vanished students.

"...So maybe this is the work of an apparition? What do you think, Miss Ireena?"

"I—I—I—I—I don't c-c-care if it's an a-a-a-a-a-apparition! I-I'll crush them in three seconds flat!" Ireena shouted, body visibly trembling.

Ginny giggled and broke into a devilish smile. I observed their exchange and mumbled quietly to myself. "When I think about apparitions, Ghosts come to mind...but I find it a bit hard to believe they could have any effect

on mortals.”

Ghosts were masses of thought that lacked all substance. It was pretty much impossible for them to cast deadly hexes on people like in the stories. They kind of just existed in the world, never making an impact on it.

...However, there was one exception.

That was if it was a thoughtform, left by someone larger than life. An example of this was the thoughtform of a great hero when I was the Demon Lord several thousand years ago. If one of these materialized forms had found their way into the dungeon and acted violently, everyone else might assume the supernatural were at work.

But I would have felt the presence of an apparition in the air, and I didn’t sense the barest whisper of it here.

“What is go—?”

I was midsentence when, without warning, the room was flooded in light

---

Its brilliance filled my vision, and we opened our eyes to a different setting.

“...Oh. This is a surprise,” I remarked with a sigh.

We’d been dropped in a forest. Moments ago, our feet had stepped across the stone dungeon and now treaded over damp earth, lush foliage all around us. Having said that, we hadn’t been transported to a new locale. Proof of this could be found above our heads, where darkness stretched in the sky rather than the familiar sun. It wasn’t the night sky, either; it was like a black wall. The forest, however, was bright as noon, even with no light source.

“Um... Um. Wh-what’s going on?” Ireena broke into a cold sweat as she took in our bizarre circumstances.

Opposite her, Ginny clapped her hands, trying to get us to get it together. “Pathetic. Look at you, so scared,” she remarked, chuckling, before growing serious and turning to face me. “Have you already forgotten that we have Ard?”

That seemed to do the trick. Ireena’s expression did an instant one-eighty—from fear to faith.

“...Ginny’s right,” I assured. “This situation presents no problems to me. In fact, it works in our favor. Our opponent has come to us.”

I partly said this to reassure the girls and express my true thoughts. Whoever had done this was behind these incidents. The mastermind had

made us their next targets.

I'd make sure they regretted this choice.

...I was still concerned about why I couldn't sense any magic, but the reason for this would be revealed in time, I imagined. Our priority at the moment was...

"Let's search the forest. This is just a theory, but...it's possible that we've been locked in an Eigen Space with boundary magic."

"Boundary magic?"

"Eigen Space?"

The moderners—Ireena and Ginny—were having trouble connecting the dots. Fair enough. In this era, both boundary magic and Eigen Spaces were Lost Skills, niche spells.

"They forcibly transport the target *and* the caster. If the caster is defeated while inside that space, the target can return to the real world."

As Ireena and Ginny nodded furiously, I crossed my arms and continued.

"I'm curious as to whether the caster is also behind these incidents under review. For now, let's do our best to escape this Eigen Space and uncover the truth."

The girls appeared to understand the game plan, and we trekked farther into the forest. Our eyes and ears were open, yet we sensed nothing out of the ordinary. It was silent to an annoying degree, and the plants surrounding us on all sides were almost nauseatingly dense.

In the midst of this, we discovered something.

"I-is that...?!"

"...A-a dead body...?!"

Ireena's and Ginny's skin grew clammy. Before their very eyes was a skeleton hanging from a large tree nearby. Ginny had stayed strong until that point, but even she couldn't hide her distress now. The corpse shook the heart of a moderner like Ireena, too.

It wasn't a rare thing for me. I casually approached the skeleton to inspect it.

"Hmm... This fabric must have come from a uniform. There's no question that this person was the victim of something."

How unfortunate. If the astral spirit was still present, I could have revived them, but they had already ascended—their spirit had left this world.

...The person had to have hoped to live longer. There must have been

things left to do in their life. It was clear that I wasn't the only one feeling righteous indignation toward whoever took this child's life and future.

"...I won't let anyone else fall victim," Ireena growled.

"...Me neither," Ginny added.

They sounded like they were vowing to the lost soul. Making up their minds, their steps became swift and sure. It was a pace that said *We're going to find that criminal and put a stop to their violence.*

...A half hour after resuming our search—another development dampened their spirits.

"Um. Th-that's..."

"Th-the same skeleton from before...?"

We were met with the same sight thirty minutes later. Initially, we thought it might be a different victim, but this was confirmed not to be the case. The corpse was the one from before. Which meant—

"It seems a Wandering Curse has been placed upon us without our knowledge."

"A Wandering Curse?" Ginny asked.

"Yes. One example of curse magic being used within this forest. It throws off the target's sense of direction, and they continue to roam the same area before starving to death, but..."

I hadn't sensed any magic. Was there really anyone out there so powerful that they could suppress their magic enough to keep me from picking up its residue? No one like that had existed even in ancient times...

Anyway, I needed to focus on the present. Once I cast cancellation magic on everyone and nullified the curse, we set off into the forest once again.

Several minutes later...

"...Hmm. Fascinating."

We were back at the same skeleton.

"Wh-what's going on...? Did the nullification spell not work...?"

"That might be the case, or it might not... I must say I find this confounding."

I had definitely cast nullification magic. And yet, here we were. I could only scratch my head at this conundrum.

"S-so this is a curse Ard can't even break..."

"H-how could there be such a thing...?"

The girls were growing more distressed...but I wasn't exactly sure why.

“Fear not. Our current predicament is perplexing, but it’s not impossible.”

“Huh? D-do you have a plan?”

“Yes. A very simple and straightforward one,” I said, giving Ireena a smile before lowering my voice. “If we cannot break the Wandering Curse, we will just have to create a situation where we’re not lost.”

Then...I cast attack magic. Sixteen circles appeared around us. Beams of crimson light shot out, burning down the entire forest almost instantly.

“I get it now! If we’re lost in a forest, we just have to get rid of it!”

“I knew you could fix things, Ard! I never would have dreamed up such a plan!”

The girls sung my praises.

*“This person is different.”*

I heard an unfamiliar voice and quickly cast a detection spell. I couldn’t pick up on any magical response, however. Maybe it was all in my head... A strange sensation washed over me, making me frown.

My sixth sense warned of danger. Not wasting any time, I instinctively canceled the magic circles and leaped backward. At the same time, I used a wind spell to lift Ireena and Ginny into the air and bring them with me.

“Wha—?”

Both were startled when I jerked them out of harm’s way. The ground we’d just been standing on began to rise, and—

*“ROAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!”*

Clods of earth cut through the air as a giant caterpillar monster burst out of the ground, disgusting mouth open and lined with razor-sharp teeth. If we’d waited a second longer, we would have been its next meal.

It wasn’t *that* big of a deal.

“I’m not a fan of getting swallowed whole...or insects. In fact, I hate bugs,” I whispered to no one in particular, seething in hostility. “You’re a sight for sore eyes. I’ll dispatch of you quickly.”

The earlier surprise attack had forced me to cancel out my magic circles. I conjured them up again, firing them at the monster in front of us with as much heat as I could muster.

*“AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”*

It failed to get away, quickly vanishing into the inferno.

*...Weird. Even a pea-brained monster should have been able to avoid the attack.*

As soon as this thought crossed my mind, I understood something: The caterpillar was a decoy. The real contender...

“GAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

...was this guy.

Before anyone could notice, a goblin shaman appeared right next to us. It was dressed in long leaves and grasses and held a staff in its hand. And as soon as it screamed...

“H-huh...? M-my body is...!”

“I...can’t move...!”

Ireena, Ginny, and I were in the same condition.

“Hmm. Fascinating. Our bodies aren’t paralyzed... This is a form of magic that stops time within a material form. A low-level spell for someone like myself, but I’m astonished a goblin is able to use a time-manipulation spell.”

“A-a time-manipulation spell...?!?”

Ireena’s eyes were like saucers, surprise personified. It was no wonder, really. After all, any magic involving time was considered a major Lost Skill in this era. It had been tricky to find someone who could wield it even back in ancient times. Time-manipulation magic was an incredibly powerful technique that could only be mastered by the most accomplished of mages.

In other words, there was no way a spell like this could keep a former ancient heavyweight—read: me—down.

“*Flare.*” I raised my arm calmly, pointing my finger at the goblin as I glanced at the immobile girls.

A magic circle unfurled under the creature, and a pillar of crimson light fired into the sky.

“GAAAH?!” It jumped to the side to escape the heat ray, eyes bulging from its head.

“Hmph. You’re nimble by all appearances,” I praised.

Ireena stared at me. “Y-you’re amazing, Ard. You can move even when time has stopped.”

“Oh, no. I’m not moving. I’m the one *being* moved.”

“...Huh?” Ireena cocked her head to the side.

I tried to explain. “A time-manipulation spell isn’t exactly what it sounds like. It interferes with the target’s astral spirit and looks like it stops or rewinds time. Counteracting this spell is simple. My astral spirit is split into

multiples, so I control my body via the untampered ones. That is the only way I am able to ward off magic.”

“...I...don’t follow, but I *do* know you’re awesome, Ard!” Ireena shouted.

“Exactly! His powers are on a different level!”

I had thought my explanation was pretty straightforward. Well, there wasn’t much I could do if they weren’t getting it. Our priority was...

“Let’s put an end to this. I doubt you can provide any information on our —”

—*foe*, I was about to say...

“*You’re strong. So strong. You might be able to...*,” garbled the goblin, seeming slightly upset by the unexpected turn of events.

A second later, its body dissolved into light particles and reformed into a single mass—a ball of light the size of a large fist with winglike appendages. I’d never seen anything like this before in my life, but a certain word flashed in my mind.

“*Incredible. This person is incredible,*” cried out another voice from elsewhere.

I turned to face it—another winged ball of light soaring up from where the caterpillar monster used to be.

“Are you both...sprites?”

The two orbs of light flashed as if in confirmation.

“*Uh-huh.*”

“*Righto. Righto.*”

“*Friend to humans. Allies.*”

“*Always by your side. The cutest sprites.*”

Sprites. I knew it. All the unknowns about this situation began to dispel.

“I see. It’s no wonder I couldn’t sense any magic.”

Sprites had powers very similar to magic—something nearly identical but also different. With unique abilities, they used an energy completely divorced from magic, which was why they didn’t give off any residue—hence why I couldn’t detect them. It was the reason we failed to find any clues in the dungeon.

“Um, question. Weren’t sprites destroyed back in ancient times?” Ireena whispered with a wide-eyed look.

“Lady Olivia taught us that. When the Old Gods were wiped out, the sprites disappeared along with them, she said.”

Sprites were considered extinct in the modern world. According to all known records, they were creations of the Old Gods...the rulers of a time known as the far ancient era, which was centuries before my past life. They supported our lives, serving as friends to humanity...supposedly.

This was all speculation based on old records, and I didn't know if it was true. What I *did* know was that the sprites vanished when their masters and Creators—the Old Gods—were destroyed for whatever reason. This was fact.

There was one more thing I was certain of.

"You're the ones taking people away, right?"

The two sprites flickered, appearing to convey sorrow.

*"Righto. Righto."*

*"We killed them. We killed them."*

*"We didn't want to, but we did."*

*"It makes me upset—so upset."*

*"We killed them."*

*"Someone ordered us to."*

*"We wanted to refuse, but we couldn't."*

Someone. I frowned at the word. I was just about to voice my questions, when—the sprites' bodies glowed as they pleaded with me.

*"Help us. Please help us."*

*"We don't want to hurt anyone else."*

*"We love people. We don't want to kill them anymore."*

*"Get rid of that guy."*

*"You're our only hope."*

The sorrow in their voices almost broke my heart. They were most definitely in the wrong in this situation, though someone else seemed to be pulling the strings.

"Who is this 'guy' you keep talking about?"

*"That's—"* The sprites were about to answer...

*"Swine. Do you dare defy your Creator?"*

For a moment, I asked myself if this was an earthquake. The rumble was far louder and deeper than any person could ever produce.

"...I get it now," I whispered to myself as the earth began to shake so violently that it was impossible to stand.

"Aaaah!"

Ireena and Ginny toppled down onto their butts. Tendrils of ivy shot from

beneath their feet and tried to twine around their bodies. Naturally, I wouldn't let anything happen to them. After casting a blade of wind and cutting down the ivy, I used defensive magic over Ireena and Ginny. The glowing golden film would protect them. After making sure they were safe...

"Oh dear. Seems this situation is bigger than I anticipated."

I lifted the girls into the sky with wind magic and cast a flight spell on myself to soar through the space. Just as we flew toward the edge of the black wall that served as the limit of the Eigen Space—the ground where we once stood split to reveal the truth.

"Wh-what *is* that...?!" Ireena's eyes widened. Ginny's, too.

Their reactions were normal. The revelation before their eyes would have made anyone gape in shock.

We hadn't been trekking through a forest in the Eigen Space. We'd been walking across the motionless surface of a giant. That "forest" was one part of its form.

"Hmm. It's huge. And 'huge' might be an understatement."

It seemed pointless to try to measure it. This incalculably massive figure slowly turned its stone face toward us.

*"Ard Meteor, was it...? Offer your life to me..."*

Its voice was like a storm, sound waves followed by gusts of wind that swept back my hair as I floated in the sky.

"Am I right to guess you're a thoughtform of an Old God?"

*"Indeed...meek human child..."*

*I knew it.*

"The Old Gods perished for untold reasons. Some left thoughtforms to plan their own resurrections... I've heard the legendary tale but never imagined it would prove true."

*"Yes...I did perish once...but on the verge of death, I left my thoughts within a labyrinth... All so I could return and rule this world once more..."*

So an Old God's thoughtform had made a home of our school dungeon, of all places. What a strange coincidence... I had to assume this whole mess started because I was somehow drawn to this coincidence.

"Did you start to move—after lying dormant in the dungeon since ancient times—because...I stepped foot in this dungeon?"

When I asked this, a low rumble escaped the Old God's stony throat. It was definitely a muffled laugh.

*“I’ve always longed for resurrection...and devoured countless souls to this end... But time kept passing, and I never succeeded... So I resigned myself to my fate... Months and years passed...and melted into an eternity... until an opportunity appeared...”*

In other words, me.

*“If I devour your soul...I can have a new physical body...and materialize in this world once again... You’ve come straight to me like I planned... Even those shitty souls have proved useful...”*

“...By ‘shitty souls,’ do you mean the lives of the student victims?”

*“And what if...I do...?”*

I bristled with rage when the Old God seemed to imply *So what?* Ireena and Ginny were angry, too, their expressions hardening.

“Consider retracting your statement. All souls that you took were precious—not something to be snatched away. Their futures—”

*“Save it. Don’t bore me...or get too cocky, human... I am a God... All of humanity exists for us... You should be grateful for the chance to offer up your life... Don’t you dare think you have the grounds to complain...”*

“It’s my humble opinion that your only duty as one fallen to ruin is to watch over a world ruled by humankind.”

*“Humble, indeed... Humanity is destined to be under our heel... They’re livestock known as humankind—regulated and milked by the gods... This is divine providence... Lower life-forms live and die for us... That’s your greatest happiness...”*

*I see.* So we wouldn’t come to a mutual understanding anytime soon.

“I almost align myself with human supremacy, you see. The mere thought of a world where pompous transcendentials treat humanity like slaves... absolutely repulses me.”

Then...I pointed at the Old God and made my declaration.

“I, Ard Meteor, shall perform your last rites.”

An instant later, its mouth opened to unleash violent rumbling and a gale storm, roaring with laughter. The giant before us was scorning me.

*“A fool... I am a God... Lower life-forms should watch their mouths...!”*

Then...

*“Your soul...will be mine!”*

I sensed hostility and piled on layer after layer of defensive magic around Ireena and Ginny before putting a good deal of distance between us.

An instant later—the Old God glittered red from head to toe and filled my vision with a deep crimson. I felt the heat. I must have been hit by an attack.

There was no magical reaction whatsoever. Was this the power of the Old Gods?

Exposed to melting temperatures, half my body was gone before I even had a chance to notice. It wasn't an issue, though.

*"Giga Heal,"* I chanted, and my body and clothes regenerated instantly.

*"Oh... Persistent, are you? ...How about this...?"* he thundered.

Immediately after, two spheres of light floated in front of me—the sprites, the poor creatures who had begged for my help only a short while earlier.

*"Aaaaargh."*

*"H-help..."*

Their voices sounded strained. Then...their glowing bodies puffed out, and my vision turned pure white.

They had exploded. The force of it was intense, and I wouldn't have been surprised to see it blow away a town or two if we were in the real world. That said, it was much too weak to do any damage to me.

*"You know how to take a hit...but you can't...keep regenerating forever..."*

Like moments before, I healed myself in an instant. The Old God pointed a finger at me, and the exploded sprites suddenly seemed to respawn.

*"U-ugh."*

*"P-please stop."*

They gave off light and heat from the pain. This must have been the best that the Old God could do. Or he was using a weak attack, mocking me.

He did it again and again. In an unending loop, the sprites were reborn only to explode again. They suffered and cried out death throes, and then...

*"Help..."*

*"Please don't hurt us anymore..."*

*"Help...us. Please."*

*"Gaaaaaaaaaah!"* Their tormented screams continued.

I imagined that made fifteen. After I finished healing myself, I questioned the Old God.

*"Doesn't it hurt your heart to use the weak, tread on them, and inflict a never-ending cycle of pain? Doesn't the injustice disgust you?"*

*"Do...you even hear yourself...?"* He sounded scornful. *"Like you..."*

*sprites are a lower life-form...nothing more than livestock or tools... Why should I hold back...? Because a tool screams out in pain...? It should be grateful that it was even used...*

...Back when I was the Demon Lord, I was constantly admonished for being too arrogant, but my ego never got this big.

“My words might be in vain, but there are no hierarchies between any life-forms. Every life is precious. Using them as tools is inexcusable.”

*“Do not put me up to...your vulgar standards... I am a God...”*

“A God? You don’t look like one to me. From what I can tell, you are a stupid child drunk on their own power.” I snorted, and this seemed to piss him off.

*“Do not mock me...! Swine...!”* The Old God was really angry now. He pointed at me and prepared to make the sprites explode again.

*“Aaaaaah...!”*

*“Ggh...!”*

Tiny shrieks. Grand explosion. An impressive amount of force and heat, but it was useless against me. The Old God might have grown tired of waiting or become irritated, since...

*“Hmph... You are persistent...for a worm... However...”*

I saw the rocky face grin.

*“How about this...?”*

I saw through the Old God’s plan in an instant. At the moment of realization, a hole to a different dimension opened next to Ireena and Ginny, who were still floating in the air with golden walls of protection around them.

—Lightning flashed out of them.

Of course, this development was within the realm of my expectations. That’s why it was simple to deflect. In fact, I didn’t need to counteract it at all. An attack of that level couldn’t scratch the girls’ defenses. However...

*“I won’t let you...!”*

The sprites had come to a different conclusion. The sparkling orbs raced past the lightning toward Ireena and Ginny and protected them as two shining shields that towered over them.

*“N-ngh...!”* The sprites cried out in torment, taking the brunt of the attack.

*“Y-you guys...!”*

*“Wh-why would you...?!”*

The girls shouted, confused. Although the sprites answered between intermittent pauses, their intentions were clear.

*"We don't want..."*

*"...to hurt people anymore."*

*"We won't..."*

*"...let anyone else suffer."*

In short, they were rebelling against their master.

The Old God convulsed, visibly upset at his servants rising up against him, and an earth-shattering voice boomed.

*"There is no defying your Creator...! You're just tools...!"* The Old God pointed at the sprites. The orbs of light swelled, and just as they were about to explode...

*"N...no...!"*

*"We are...friends of humanity...!"*

The sprites put up their iron will and defied their Creator. This seemed like an impossible scenario. The Old God was at a loss.

*"You...! A tool dare assert its own will...?!"* he roared in fury. The energy flowing from his fingertip intensified, causing the sprites to blow up again. *"Tools...are made to obey orders...!"* yelled the Old God, trying to squash their rebellious spirits.

He had been forcing these lovers of humankind to kill humanity. Just as the sprites were about to submit to his orders once again...

*"Do you think I would allow this tragedy to happen before me?"*

The sprites stopped ballooning.

*"H-how...?!"*

The orbs remained next to Ireena and Ginny fully intact, showing no signs of exploding. The flickering lights indicated their own confusion.

*"Ngh...! What...?! What's...going on...?!"*

I offered the furious being a smile and launched into an explanation. "You can no longer use your powers. I've already analyzed and taken control of them."

*"What...?!"*

The stony face was blank, but I could tell he was agitated. I elaborated further as I looked down on the Old God from the sky.

"I was born with very special skills: analysis and control. I can analyze the whole of creation and bring any concept under my control. In our short

time together, I've been using this ability to dissect your powers. And now... you've been rendered useless."

The Old God had assumed he would overwhelm me, thinking I'd have my hands full with regenerating and never risk a counterattack. He assumed he was above me.

But he had miscalculated. Little did he know he was being reduced to nothing.

*"Ridiculous...! This is...!"*

He tried to use his powers, but it was all in vain. I had sealed them away entirely. He would never explode the sprites or unleash anything like his initial heat attack again.

*"Impossible...! I am a God...! That means a mere human can't...!"*

"I don't think like you," I said briefly as the corners of my mouth tugged into a bigger smile. "Did you honestly think some God could win against me?"

I wasn't sure if he heard me. The earth continued to tremble with his howling for a moment, then...

*"I am a God...! Someone who rules and guides this world...! I...will never be defeated by life-forms lower than beasts!!"*

With an ear-shattering boom, the Old God moved—body too large to be measured—and lumbered toward me furiously.

*"BOW BEFORE MY POWER! WOOOOOOOOOOOOORM!"* His giant fist came down on me as if swatting a tiny human fly.

"A worm. Ha-ha, a worm, you say?" My eyes narrowed, and my voice went cold. "That's you, moron."

I cast attack magic. An amalgamation of flames and wind came together as I summoned my Blaze Sword. A circle manifested in front of my hand, and the fiery blade appeared moments later...and then, it instantly transformed into a terrifyingly large weapon.

"You're a husk of your old self. Go home." I sidestepped the mountain-size fist coming right at me—and sliced the fist and towering Old God in half.

*"Aaaah...! Th-this...can't be...happening! I'm...! A master of all creation...!"*

The lethal attack made it too difficult for the thoughtform to keep its silhouette, and the hulking being started to break into light particles.

*“GAAAAAAAH! DON’T THINK THIS IS OVER...! I’LL BE BACK...!”*

“Geez. Why do egotistic villains always say that?”

I sighed and declared the same thing I did back when I was the Demon Lord.

“No matter how many times you come back or how many strategies you try—”

“—I’ll destroy you every time.”



Soon after the thoughtform of the Old God vanished, the setting totally changed around us.

It was all stone. We were in a room of the dungeon.

“That settles that!”

“You were amazing as always, Ard.”

As the girls spoke...light orbs glowed before me. It was the sprites. Maybe because they were now free from the shackles of the Old God, they seemed much more upbeat.

*“Thank you. Thank you.”*

*“It’s all over now.”*

As soon as they said this...their bodies glittered and began to disappear.

“Huh? Wait, wh-what’s going on?”

“It must be because the Old God is no more. Without him, even the sprites...”

The sprites flickered as if to confirm my theory.

“Th-that can’t be...! That isn’t fair! They’re finally free of that awful guy!”

Ireena’s face crumpled in sorrow, and Ginny appeared conflicted. On the other side, the sprites were accepting of their fate.

*“This is fine.”*

*“We killed people.”*

*“We killed the people we love so much.”*

*“We must pay the price.”*

“The Old God made you do that! You did nothing wrong! Besides... didn’t you try to protect us?! You even fought against him! You’re too nice

to just vanish from this world!” Tears welled in Ireena’s eyes as she looked at the sprites who were now practically gone.

Perhaps heartened by her words, the sprites emitted a warm light.

*“If we were to ask for one thing...”*

*“...We would have loved to talk to people more.”*

*“We wanted to play with people.”*

*“We wanted to see people smile.”*

*“...We wanted to spend more time with you.”*

These sounded like final words. Ireena, Ginny, and the sprites themselves came to terms with their inevitable parting. In the midst of this...

“As Ireena has stated, it’s the Old God—not you—who is responsible for this incident. There is no need for you to feel guilty. And so—”

With a smile, I voiced the future dreamed by everyone present.

“I shall grant the wish you have just shared with us.”



A few days later. Morning homeroom at the Laville National Academy of Magic.

“Two new students will be joining our class.”

With her usual gloominess, Olivia introduced a pair of charming twins.

“I’m Lumi.”

“I’m Lami.”

““It’s nice to meet you, everyone,”” they sung, flashing bewitching smiles.

The boys in the class were instantly enchanted by them.

“They’re so cute.”

“Twins are a plus in my book.”

“I can date one—and the other... Heh-heh. I could daydream forever.”

Their energy was palpable. However...

“That’s enough introductions. Okay, take your sea—”

“Daddy!”

“We did it! We introduced ourselves properly!”

Lumi and Lami—former sprites reborn as humans—cut Olivia off and rushed over to me.

“Praise me! Praise me!”

“Pet me! Pet me!”

The petite pair snuggled up to me like adorable puppies. In response to this, the boys...

“...Ard. I wish he were dead.”

“Maybe it’s about time to kill him.”

“Let’s hold a meeting at lunch.”

Their homicidal intentions seemed real. Why’d things turn out this way?

...Anyway, the girls were now mortal. Ireena and Ginny called it a miracle, but I didn’t see what the big deal was. It was the same alchemy spell that I’d used when Sylphy ruined Olivia’s potatoes earlier. Nothing more.

Alchemy was essentially a conversion of information, which was why I could make bodies out of the stone walls of the dungeon, rewrite the sprites’ causal data, and convert them into astral spirits of humans. I then placed their new astral spirits into physical bodies. Basically, a walk in the park.

“P-please let go.”

“Nope!”

“We’re staying with you, Daddy!”



The former sprites had taken to calling me Daddy.

“...I’m glad this story has a happy ending, but why do I feel icky about this?”

“Oh-ho-ho-ho-ho. As I expected, Miss Ireena. Your intolerance is the only impressive thing about you.”

“*Nom, nom...* Ard’s homemade lunches...*nom...*are totally the best...”

Ireena was burning with jealousy. Ginny was ridiculing her. Sylphy was already rooting through her lunch... But I guess none of that really mattered.

“What do you think would kill Ard?”

“I don’t think a night raid would work.”

“And my assassin acquaintances are booked, too.”

“Well, let’s not rush things. We’ll put our heads together and come up with a plan to end him for good.”

The boys were legit plotting to kill me.

I could lead a person to happiness and destroy evil with no problems.  
Compared to that...

...making regular friends was seriously impossible.



Those Outcast Fear  
Others—The King  
Delivers This Judgment

**Dues to the  
Demon Lord  
Reborn:  
Of Intimacy  
and Salvation**

## Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: Of Intimacy and Salvation

### Those Outcast Fear Others—The King Delivers This Judgment

“I DID ITTTTTTTTTTTTTT!”

Noon at the Academy. I could hear a certain idiot’s screams echoing down the first-floor hallway connecting the first-year classrooms. Naturally, it caught the attention of the students, who looked at the source.

Immediately after, our eyes slid toward the paper affixed to the wall, posting the results for practical and written finals. The students were checking their grades and comparing their ranks, either breaking down or jumping in joy based on the outcome.

Among them, Sylphy raised both arms, eyes brimming with tears. Ireena and Ginny frowned as they watched the girl act like she was on top of the world.

“Um...what did you do, exactly?”

“Miss Sylphy. Didn’t you score last place again by a wide margin?”

Sylphy Marheaven—a natural troublemaker and impressively stupid—managed to score below 20 percent on all subjects this semester. A first in school history. She even earned a zero in combat—her one forte—because she ignored every rule in the practical exam and made a total mess. This, too, was a new record.

Even in this situation, Sylphy snorted, taking on a look of pure pride.

“Who cares about the test scores?! Look! Look at this!”

She held something out that she’d been gripping in her right hand for some time. A weekly entertainment magazine. The printing industry was having a bit of a revolution, which was influencing the shift in chosen entertainment. One might say a regularly circulating magazine was the perfect example of this.

Sylphy was holding an entertainment magazine that was popular with women and featured romantic stories and gossip about stage actors. She flipped to a certain page—

“Look at my horoscope for the week! My star is finally coming in first!”

In this country, one’s star was decided by the date of their birth. Each one was named after a different constellation...and Sylphy’s was Leo King.

“My horoscope *always* says ‘You suck’ or ‘You’ll regret being born,’ but I’m finally number one! This week, Leo King girls will have the best luck! It’s my time to shine! Ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Sylphy thrust out her flat chest with a loud laugh, but that didn’t change the fact that her test scores placed her last. What made her so lucky again?

“By the way! Ireena and Ginny—you’re in for some good luck, too! And you’re in second place, Ard! You’re worse off than me, but the magazine says you’ll coast through this week!”

“Hmm... I guess—,” Ireena started.

“—that doesn’t hurt to hear.”

The two girls each put one hand to their cheeks, mouths curling into tiny smiles.

Yeah. It didn’t hurt to hear. That said, horoscopes weren’t very reliable. My main issue was that horoscopes were based on astrology. In other words, you used the alignment of stars to divine your fortune. In that case—

“Hmm? So you believe in horoscopes, too, Ard Meteor?”

The speaker was snide—a classmate named Veronica von Velgr de Falmes. The von Velgr part indicated she was a daughter of a duke, the highest of the nobility. Her most distinctive characteristics were her braided golden hair and confident face.

A sneer formed on her lips. “So you’re mortal just like the rest of us—letting the results of some fortune dictate how you feel. Honestly, it’s laughable.”

Veronica’s eyes held visible antagonism.

Ireena, unable to tolerate her attitude, turned bright red. “What’s your problem?! You’re so annoying!”

“Oh? Aren’t you the daughter of some tiny baron? Um, what was your name again...? Meleena?”

“It’s Ireena!”

“Whoopsie. I don’t bother remembering the names of those I don’t

notice.”

This seemed to make Ireena bristle with anger, eyes narrowing. This cold gaze didn’t affect Veronica in the least.

“Ard Meteor. You may have outdone me on our finals this semester...but don’t let it get to your head. The more important event is the classroom observation coming up this weekend.”

“Uh-huh. If you say so.”

There was a special lesson during the coming weekend—the classroom observation, where our parents and guardians would watch us compete in one-on-one magic battles. The opponents were matched ahead of time, and mine was this girl, Veronica, in front of me.

“I suggest that you enjoy the number one spot while you can. After this weekend, you’ll never sit there again.”

And with that, she laughed haughtily and left. Ireena continued to glare from behind.

“Hmph! She couldn’t beat Ard even if the world turned upside down!”



“I agree!” Ginny said. “Miss Veronica would have to train for a hundred million more years before declaring war on Ard.”

The two glared in her direction, obviously irritated.

On the other hand, Sylphy was thinking about something else altogether.

“Was Veronica always this way?”

“...Now that you mention it...”

“She was never one to stand out—neither causing trouble nor crowding around Ard. I remember her studying by herself.”

Veronica used to be an unassuming prodigy who plugged away at her work. Her dedication consistently put her at the top of our year, though her practical skills used to be midrange. I hated to say it...but she was kind of a letdown for the daughter of a duke.

Veronica, however, now ranked second in both written and practical exams.

“...Something is suspicious about her progress,” I mumbled.

Just then, a woman made an announcement from the magical acoustic device installed in the corner of the ceiling.

*“This is Olivia vel Vine. I’ve got a message for Ard Meteor. Please make your way to the staff room. I repeat, this is Olivia vel Vine with a message for Ard Meteor. Please—”*

After I listened to her voice—stern yet beautiful—I shrugged in exasperation.

“...I wonder what they’ll put on me this time?”



Not long after, we headed to the staff room and met with the voice from the broadcast.

Olivia. My elder sister of sorts, with black animal ears and a tail characteristic of a therianthrope. A woman renowned for her cold beauty, she was both an instructor at the Academy and a former Heavenly King.

The first words out of her mouth...

“You know a student named Veronica, right?”

Was this some kind of coincidence? She brought up the one student on our minds.

I nodded, feeling like this was fate.

“As you guys know, she’s not really one to grab anyone’s attention. Except...her skills have grown exponentially, and now she’s number two in your grade.”

“Hmm. Are you saying you’re more suspicious of than pleased by your pupil’s progress?”

“...Yeah. She got good *too* fast. I wouldn’t think anything of it if it was only her classwork. That just depends on how you apply yourself. But practical skills are different. There’s no way that she could shoot up the ranks.”

“...I was also thinking about that. I wonder if she’s involved in something not good.”

“Oh. That saves me time, then. Keep an eye on her and deal with anything suspicious.”

I nodded and prepared to leave the staff room. However...before I could, Sylphy shoved her magazine at Olivia.

“Look at this, Olivia! Your fortune is rotten this week! *Pfft!* You better be careful! You’re in last place! *Pfft!*”

“...Hmph. Horoscopes? A total waste of time.”

“*Pfft!* You might act like it doesn’t bother you, but I bet you’re crestfallen on the inside!”

“...Horoscopes are bullshit. Anyone who believes in them is—”

—*an idiot*, I imagined she would say. Before she could get the words out...

*BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!*

An explosion came from nowhere, rocking the room. It sounded like it originated from the roof. It was at this point...that Olivia seemed to grasp the situation.

“Heh, hee-hee. Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee.” She broke into a radiant smile. After all, her potato garden was up on the roof. “Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha. Want to bet my precious potatoes are burned to a crisp? Didn’t you set that magic trap, Sylphy?”

“W-well, uh...”

“By the way, Sylphy, how’s your horoscope looking?”

“M-my star is the luckiest.”

“Yes, yes. I knew it. Horoscopes are totally fake.” Olivia swiftly got on her feet.

Sylphy darted on reflex. “Aaaaah?!”

There was no escape. Grabbing the girl’s nape, Olivia caught her almost instantly.

“Since you placed last in your grade, I’ll congratulate you by adding more *oomph* than usual. ♪” Olivia dragged Sylphy away with a blinding smile.

“H-help meeeeeeee!”

All we did was coldly stare at her as she was taken to who knows where.



Fast-forward to after school. As everyone returned to their dorms or homes, we set to work.

Our mission was to tail Veronica. She seemed to live off campus, seeing as she slipped through the gate without heading toward the dorms.

“Think she’ll stop somewhere?” Ireena asked.

“If there are demons involved,” Ginny replied.

“Ow-ow-ow-ow... I’m... I’m still seeing stars...”

Sylphy seemed to have a few extra screws loose after Olivia was done with her.

We followed our target at a distance far enough to prevent her from detecting us. As Veronica stepped into a carriage, I thought the girls might be onto something...but the destination was her palatial residence.

It was luxurious enough to be a duke’s manor. The sprawling garden was secluded from the outside world by a huge gate and guards...which made it impossible to get any closer.

“Since she went straight home...is it safe to say she’s innocent?”

“It’s too soon to say. This is either a one-day anomaly or something is occurring within the household. Like a family member may be controlling her,” Ginny concluded.

“Y-you might be right,” Ireena said. “...How can we check inside? Invade it?”

I shook my head. “There’s no need to enter the manor. Please come this way.”

I led everyone to a backstreet, hoping to avoid drawing attention to ourselves, and then cast magic—circles with complex geometric patterns unfolding before us that transformed into a large mirror. It floated in midair.

Ireena tilted her head. “Wh-what’s this?”

“Vista magic. With this, we can peek in on Lady Veronica’s private life.”

As I finished speaking, the mirror showed us Veronica. Maids were greeting her in an unbelievably big foyer. She handed over her schoolbag, headed to her room, and quickly changed into an ornate outfit. So far, her after-school activities were just like any other aristocratic young lady’s. Veronica sat at her wide desk and began flipping through a textbook.

“It looks like...she’s just reviewing coursework,” Ireena commented.

“Agreed,” Ginny said. “Maybe...there is a secret within her textbook?”

“No. Veronica is studying. For now, at least,” I answered.

She wrote something down on parchment, staring intently at her history textbook. She was doing rote memorization to help her remember the contents. Her paper contained objectionable words—*demons* and *Evil Gods*—but nothing appeared to be problematic. She was the image of a model student.

As the daughter of a duke, Veronica wasn’t happy about ranking second and threw herself into her studies. It was hard not to be impressed. Even Ireena, who had just been fighting with her, seemed to feel the same way.

“...She’s a hard worker. I’ll give her that.”

“...The speed of her recent progress must be the fruit of her efforts,” Ginny concurred.

I wanted to agree. However...

“That doesn’t explain her sudden haughtiness.”

“Hmm. Maybe she’s always been like that?” Ireena asked.

“I can’t rule out the possibility. But...something doesn’t sit right with me.”

I was thinking about a certain thing.

I continued to watch Veronica, who remained engrossed in her studies until a maid called her, and she headed to the dining table.

Her family sat around a long table in the center of an immense room. Veronica was one of five siblings. The man—I assumed he was the father—said a prayer before the meal as they folded their hands. After that, the mother added a few words, and they began to eat.

“What do you think, Ard? Who seems suspect?”

“No one. They appear perfectly normal. I don’t believe any of them are controlling her.”

We paid close attention to Veronica’s family dinner.

“By the way, Veronica, I heard you placed second in the final written and practical exams,” said her stately father.

Veronica’s face immediately seemed to light up with hope. She visibly wanted to be praised. But—

“It’s vital that members of our household always strive for the highest excellence. You just aren’t there yet.” Veronica’s father didn’t say the thing she’d hoped to hear.

“...!” Her childlike, cherubic features screwed up in pain, and she gritted her teeth...

Another girl—her elder sister—spoke disdainfully. “Father is right. The family members of a duke always should be in the best of seats. Failure to achieve that is a sign of inadequacy.”

“...Cut the bullshit. You’re beneath me.”

“Hmm? Did you say something?”

“...No, nothing.”

They didn’t appear to be on good terms. When I took a closer look, I realized it wasn’t just the elder sister; her younger brothers and sisters were staring at Veronica. It was clear they didn’t think highly of her, either. It felt like they were saying *Serves you right*.

Veronica, however, paid them no heed and turned to her parents. “Father. Mother. As you know, classroom observations are this weekend. My opponent...is Ard Meteor.”

“Oh my...!”

“The son of the Great Heroes?”

“Yes. I promise you will see me defeat him during this special lesson. And when I do—”

Then Veronica faltered, and her eyes began to dart around.

Her father looked at her dubiously. “What is it?”

“...Nothing. I shall do everything in my power to meet your expectations.”

“Naturally,” he said.

“I look forward to it.”

The atmosphere seemed tense. There was nothing inviting about this dinner. You might say it was quintessentially aristocratic.

...After the meal, Veronica took a bath, returned to her room, and resumed her study session. There was a knock at the door, and a figure entered the room before she could answer it.

It was her elder sister.

“Oh, studying hard again. I applaud your wasted efforts.”

Her sister had assumed a more wicked expression than the one she’d worn at the dinner table.

Veronica returned this with a smile. “You’re the one who lost to those ‘wasted efforts,’ Sister. I’m now number one in this house. No one notices you anymore.”

Her sister’s face scrunched up, clearly displeased. She, however, was aware that she was a daughter of the nobility. She quickly switched to a placid smile.

“Yes. I admit your progress. You may look like a new person on the surface...but you’re still the same inside. A failed and talentless duke’s daughter who ugly-cries whenever we tease you. Your true self will never change.”

It was here that Veronica faced her sister, clearly hostile. She gripped her fists, and a crease formed along her forehead. Her sister found this amusing and giggled.

“Let me guess what you wanted to say to Mother and Father during dinner: *I’ll defeat Ard Meteor, and when I do—please love me.*”

The hatred on Veronica’s face seemed to intensify.

“Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! You’re so weird! There’s no way they’ll ever love human garbage!”

Veronica glared as her sister gripped her sides in laughter. Her expression said she wanted to object but couldn’t. In the depths of Veronica’s heart, she had accepted her sister’s words. The truth was all too clear... She had no confidence in herself.

“Don’t let it get to your head—or get too comfortable. If you lose focus, you’ll find yourself back where you started. Do your best this weekend, Veronica the Dropout.”

After saying what she wanted, the elder sister smugly left the room.

“.....Dammit!” Veronica slammed her fist against the desk, body

trembling. She immediately went to work in a frenzy.

One hour passed, then two. Even when everyone else was fast asleep, Veronica remained glued to her desk. A maid came in and suggested she go to bed.

“Just a bit longer. Please let me do this.”

“B-but sleep deprivation is bad for the body.”

“I’m fine. My grades are more important than my health.”

Ignoring the maid’s advice, Veronica continued glaring at her textbook.

“I’m no genius. That’s why I have to work so hard. Harder than anyone else. Much, much harder.” Veronica’s quill raced across the parchment as she mumbled to herself. “...That sister of mine is right, frustratingly enough. If my grades fall behind even a little, I’ll go back to being a failure. I won’t allow that. I want Mother and Father to love me. I want to die loved.”

The girl at the desk was consumed with madness. Her family situation was unmistakably the root of her twisted mindset.

“...Every noble family is different, I guess. Mine isn’t like this at all,” Ireena noted.

“...I am basically the daughter of a count, but I’ve never had to endure such a stifling environment.”

“As the daughter of a duke, Veronica’s skills are lacking,” I added. “That is why her siblings treat her so poorly...and made her the target of their bullying.”

This was what distorted Veronica’s thoughts. She had an intense desire to exact revenge on her siblings. Furthermore...she wanted her parents to love and approve of her. Growing up in this dysfunctional family had robbed her of every scrap of confidence—roots and all.

“...I guess I can see now why she acts stuck-up,” said Ireena.

Ginny and Sylphy looked like they agreed. I did not.

Ireena was right that it wasn’t strange for Veronica’s personality to have become more arrogant. In this case, however, it wasn’t only because she’d gained a bit of leverage and exacted revenge on her siblings.

There were currently two hearts inside Veronica’s body.

“Hmm. I think I get the general gist... We can solve this matter with a bit of effort.”

“Then let’s hurry up, and—”

“No. We’ll let things play out just awhile longer.” I voiced my thoughts

while looking at Veronica in the mirror. “When the time is right, we’ll resolve the situation in an appropriate manner. For Veronica’s sake, too.”



Two days later, the first-year students headed into the classroom observation.

Our stage was an arena for practical exams located on the school grounds. The interior, simply put, was a small-scale battlefield. The stage was set in the center, and the seats around it allowed spectators to watch from above.

The first-years’ parents and guardians were filling the stands. Nobility and commoners congregated together. “*That’s my boy!*” I heard from the stands.

Meanwhile, students lined the wall in the central exam arena, waiting their turns. Everyone stayed here until their name was called for the battle exam.

As usual, I was huddled together and chatting with Ireena, Ginny, and Sylphy. I heard a voice call out. “A good day to you, Ard Meteor.”

Veronica. She looked from me to Ireena and then broke into a smile.

“Neither of your parents are here today. Is that right?”

“Yes. They were busy,” I explained.

“‘Busy.’ Okay. Are you sure that’s all?”

“What do you mean?”

“Could it be that they don’t really love you?” Veronica giggled contemptuously, and Ireena flared up in anger. Despite knowing the girl’s situation, she couldn’t stay silent when Veronica accused our parents of not loving us.

“That’s not true! Our parents aren’t like yours! They’re special!”

Our parents were revered as the Great Mages and Heroic Baron, after all. When we were kids, our parents wanted to settle and hardly left the village. Ever since Ireena and I grew up and entered the Academy, they’d been busy putting out small fires everywhere. That was why we didn’t believe for a second that our parents didn’t love us, but...

“Are you sure? Today is a big day for us. Even dukes and royalty will prioritize their children over work.”

“...I think they believe in us enough that they saw no need to come.”

“Aha-ha-ha-ha! What kind of excuse is that?! You’re hilarious!” Veronica held her sides in laughter.

Ireena seemed to reach her limit. “Nghhh...! You nincompoop!” Her eyes

narrowed, and she looked ready to pounce.

“P-please stop, Miss Ireena!”

“I get that you’re mad, but reel it in!” Sylphy urged.

“Lemme goooooo! I’m only gonna hit the dummy once!”

Ginny and Sylphy put her in a full nelson, but Ireena continued to squirm. We could sympathize...but getting mad at Veronica wasn’t the answer.

“Ireena, do you remember what I told you?”

“U-um, yes, but...”

“Then please calm your temper.”

After confirming she had quieted down, I turned to Veronica.

“Expressions of love are as complex and mysterious as our hearts. Our parents’ absences don’t indicate a lack of love.”

“Well, if you say so. Maybe you’re happy they are not here to embarrass you.” Veronica gave a haughty smile and left.

Not long after...

“Next up: Ard Meteor and Veronica von Velgr de Falmes. Please come to the front.”

Upon hearing Olivia’s voice, Veronica was the first to step forward. She turned to the audience, found her parents, and waved to them with a gentle smile. That was probably her true face.

Like Veronica, I moved from the wall to the center of the arena.

“Crush her, Ard!”

“I know you’ll win even without trying, but good luck!”

“You’ll do great, Ard! After all, this is your lucky week!”

The three cheered me on from behind, and I stood in front of Veronica.

“As I promised...I’m going to take you down, Ard Meteor.”

“Please go easy on me.”

As we prepared to face off, the parents in the audience stirred.

“That’s the boy from the rumors.”

“A tough opponent, even for Falmes’s daughter.”

“A battle is all a matter of chance. No one knows what will happen.”

I was a shoo-in, apparently. Displeased by the parents’ reactions, Veronica fixed an intense gaze on me, ready to take me out.

...Well. It would be fantastic if everything worked out as I hoped, but who could say?

“Begin!” called the referee, Olivia, from next to me, and our magic battle

commenced.

“You’re going down!”

Veronica was quick to make the first move. She thrust out her right hand, a circle flashing in front of her palm...and a giant fireball blasted toward me.

“A-a *Mega Flare*?!”

“She didn’t even chant!”

“Since when was Falmes’s daughter so magically advanced...?!”

The parents were thunderstruck. The same could be said for the students.

However...a modern midlevel attack wasn’t exactly a threat to me. I formed a spell mentally, let the magic flow, and cast it, a circle cropping up in front of me to create a semitransparent wall of defense. Her fireball slammed against it, exploding. The impact and heat shattered my shield almost instantly, but I didn’t feel anything.

“H-he did that without chanting, too...!”

“Casting a midlevel defense spell without an incantation... He really is the son of the Great Mages...”

*That was just beginner stuff. Well, whatever.*

“...That was impressive, Veronica.”

“Hmph! I was just getting started! This isn’t even close to my real powers!”

“Oh? Really?” My lips curled, and I flashed her a smile, challenging her.

I’d *never* do this kind of thing normally, but I had no choice. Veronica waltzed right into my playacting.

“What’s that look for? Are you mocking me?”

“I wouldn’t dream of mocking you. I was measuring your level...and chose to look down on you.”

Veronica’s anger spiked, and I egged her on a bit more for good measure. I cast molecular conversion magic and turned part of the floor into a sword.

Stroking the blade, I called out loudly. “From this point forward, I won’t use the slightest bit of magic. I repeat. From this point forward, I will not use any magic. I shall be the one to end this battle.”

Upon hearing that, no one would be able to stop the blood from rushing to their head. Veronica was no exception.

“Don’t you dare...underestimate me!!” She cast another round of magic. It was the same “*Mega Flare*” as before, but this time, there were two at once.

“A-a *Double Cast*?!”

“Isn’t that a Lost Skill?!?”

Based on the standards of this era, it was basically the work of a god—sublime. To me, of course, it was hardly worth a yawn. I faced the incoming fireballs, but instead of casting a defense spell...I just gave my sword a light swing. The blade glided through the air and unleashed a gust of wind. The fireballs that had raced toward me vanished into thin air.

“...What?” Veronica stood there, dumbfounded. Ditto for the parents and other students.

Honestly, I wouldn’t have called it an ideal situation. I hated sticking out for multiple reasons, but...I did it to save the girl in front of me. I had steeled myself ahead of time and chosen to stand out to a certain degree.

“What’s the matter? Already giving up?”

“Tch!”

As I approached slowly, Veronica cast some more magic. This time, it was a cluster of lightning. I eliminated it with a swing of my sword, predictably at this point.

“You—!” She sent a storm of icy blades at me next. I shattered them with a swing.

“Tr-try this, then!” Veronica, struggling, cast even more magic. Fireballs, lightning, ice daggers. She broke out three elements all at once.

A *Three Cast*, huh? This had to be the final ace up her sleeve. By modern standards, she’d surpassed the realm of the gods. Veronica had literally made the impossible possible...and I risk sounding like a broken record here, but it wasn’t a big deal.

I crushed her ace with nothing more than a love tap. Then I took three steps forward and pointed my blade at her throat.

“I believe that’s checkmate?” I said with a smile.

Our referee, Olivia, nodded, about to announce the end of the battle...

“Wait! This isn’t over!” Veronica shouted. She looked down and started mumbling something to herself. “Didn’t you say I’d win...? You lied to me... At this rate...I’ll go back to being a dropout... I can’t do that... I want to be loved... I don’t want things to end like this...”

To the parents, she looked like a sore loser. I could hear the stands criticizing her.

In the midst of this...

“Veronica!”

“That’s enough!”

...Veronica seemed to be interpreting the comments from her own parents as condemnation.

“I’m a disappointment...! Everything is over...!”

She was starting to spiral, mood growing increasingly more negative. As a result...

“Why did things turn out this way...?! It’s all your fault, Ard Meteor...! If it hadn’t been for you...! I despise you...!”

She had the dull gleam in her eyes of someone who had nothing left to lose—and out of her body seeped a dark aura. It spread across the exam arena like a smoke screen, inhaled by everyone from the students at the ready to the parents and instructors in the audience.

“Wh-what’s this...?! ”

“I—I can’t move...!”

For those without a constant defense against magic, it served as a magical binding chain. The fog was so thick that I couldn’t tell what was happening to the parents...but their movements were hampered. The students and instructors were in the same state. As for my friends, a short distance away...

“Gah! This is so annoying!”

“Get offa me!”

“No matter how much I wave my arms, it won’t go away...”

They seemed to be pretty mobile, considering.

“Remain where you are. Do not leave that spot under any circumstances,” I called out against the shroud of darkness.

I then turned to our referee, Olivia, who was still standing nearby. As expected, she could move, too. Olivia, however, made no attempt to deal with the situation. She watched me carefully. It looked like she was leaving things up to me.

I gave a single nod and turned to Veronica. “...You’ve appeared as I expected.”

As soon as I murmured this, darkness condensed next to Veronica and took the form of a human shadow.

The faceless entity spoke loquaciously. “Sigh... It’s unfortunate, my vessel. I have no more power to give you. But fear not. I’ll grant your wish in your stead.”

The dark humanoid figure turned to me.

“You’re the thoughtform of an Evil God.”

“Indeed. You’re scholarly for a modern being,” replied the austere voice. It sounded like it was looking down on me...

“Veronica shot up the ranks because you’ve been possessing her. All the while, she grew more arrogant as she continued to sync with you... Isn’t that right?”

The thoughtform said nothing, snorting at me scornfully.

I pressed on. “I imagine this is an absurd question, but I’ll ask anyway: What’s your motive?”

“Hah! Absurd indeed, slave child. There is one purpose for my existence: destruction and chaos.”

What else would it be? Evil Gods were exactly as their name implied—a herd of monsters that I’d either sealed away or subjugated back in ancient times. Known as the Outer Ones at the time, they were still leaving a major impact on this world even though their days were already long gone.

And this thoughtform was one of them.

These things occasionally possessed self-awareness. Whenever that was the case, they liked to trick a suitable mortal host. Veronica must have been lured by the promise of better grades. If they fused together, she could become a better version of herself, and her parents would love her.

“It appears the thoughtform is nearly ninety percent in control...but it’s not too late, Veronica. Reject this fusion. If you meld together completely, your personality—”

“—will disappear completely, right? I know,” Veronica answered with a glare. Next to her, the human darkness smiled.

“Hee-hee. Your efforts are in vain. I’m here now because none of you can dream of beating us. This girl doesn’t fear death. She agreed as soon as I tempted her. She said she doesn’t need much time. As long as she can earn her parents’ love and give her life meaning, she’ll gladly die. That’s why we fused. Isn’t that right, my vessel?”

Veronica nodded. “I wanted...Father...and Mother...to love me...! I was willing to give my life for it...! I wanted to die happy...! That was my only wish...! But because of you...!”

Her voice, thick with resentment, echoed in the dimness. Reasoning with her seemed impossible at this point. In that case...

“There is a condition to an Evil God possessing someone. I recall...that it was a time frame.”

“Correct. You’re quite well-read for a slave child. To be precise, it’s the alignment of the stars.”

“The stars?”

“Yes. We will remain fused until the stars glittering in the heavens reach this alignment. Then I can take her physical body. When the constellations line up, our power heightens, and we can then complete the union. And...that fated moment is thirty seconds away!” Mood soaring, the thoughtform shouted with its chest thrust out in victory. “Ha-ha-ha-ha! The time has finally come! As soon as I possess this foolish girl, I’ll celebrate by torturing you to death! After that, I’ll destroy the world and resurrect my own physical body! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! I’ve never felt better!” The shadow raised both hands and laughed raucously.

I could only sigh as I watched this. “A word of warning. No one can say how this battle will end. So claiming your win before the results are in is the height of stupidity. Your ego will be your downfall.”

“My downfall? Is that what you think? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! What a thing to say! You don’t even have ten seconds left to stop me!” The thoughtform continued to laugh.

One second passed, or two. I shrugged...and asked Veronica a question as I cast a certain spell.

“Veronica. Won’t you have a change of heart?”

“.....” She gave no answer, only scowled at me.

“I see. I understand.”

Three seconds remaining.

Two.

One.

“Pray while you still can that your suffering will end quickly!” The thoughtform’s laughter echoed across the arena.

However—two and then three seconds passed, and the thoughtform changed its tune.

“...That’s strange. We should be fully fused by now. Did I time it wrong?” The voice wondered, sounding a bit deflated.

I smiled. “No, you calculated your fusion with perfect precision.”

“...What?”

“What’s the matter? What happened to your composure from earlier?”

“...What did you do?!” shouted the thoughtform with a mix of irritation and confusion.

“It’s simple. Since you said you could only possess a body if the stars were aligned in a particular fashion...”

I grinned as I revealed the truth.

“I adjusted the stars a bit. That’s all.”

My answer was greeted with silence. Of course, time continued to pass, but there were no signs that anyone would be fusing. Reality stabbed my enemy.

“R-ridiculous! Changing the stars?! That’s idiotic—”

“I don’t mean to brag. In fact, I’d prefer being humble. However, that ‘idiocy’ is child’s play. For me, that is.”

If I was being honest, it wasn’t hard to meddle with the stars. I mean, I could change karma—the foundation of this world—even to the slightest degree. This was easy.

“Im-impossible...! This is... No, it can’t be... Y-your form is different, but...! Your true self is...”

“I think you’ve got the wrong person. I’m just your average villager,” I said with a smile.

In that moment, the thoughtform realized everything and became visibly irritated.

“Tch! If—if this is how it has to be—”

“If you know my true form, I’m afraid I can’t let you go.”

The thoughtform was about to revert to a single lump of darkness and scamper off somewhere, but I had other ideas. A bevy of magic circles surrounded it, quickly transforming into a circular cage, and—

“Don’t worry. Unlike you, I have no interest in tormenting my foes to death.” I turned my palm toward the cage, and...

“A good day to you.”

...I made a fist.

In that moment, the cage constricted before disappearing, the Evil God’s thoughtform vanquished from this world...without even time for a

bloodcurdling scream.

As soon as the thoughtform was gone, the darkness covering the exam grounds immediately cleared up.

...Everything had gone according to plan. By instigating Veronica, enraging her, and pointing out that we would never be on the same level, she'd be driven by a further need for power. I surmised...this would draw out the thoughtform that felt all too confident in its victory. The plan was so simple, it wasn't even worth this explanation.

The annihilation of the enemy, however, was nothing but a warm-up.

The real show started now.

"...Why?" Veronica asked, falling to her knees like a shell of her former self. "...I can't take this anymore."

A tinge of madness entered her frail voice. She whipped out a knife from her uniform pocket and went to slide it across her throat.

I wasn't about to sit there and watch in silence. I promptly kicked the back of her hand, sending the knife flying.

"...Don't get in my way. I'm already—" Veronica's shoulders drooped.

I spoke quietly as I looked down at her. "Your life is far from over."

"...Far from over? It's lasted too long. I'm a talentless failure. My life hasn't had value since the day I was born. My siblings constantly mock me; my parents don't love me... All I wanted for someone like me...was a happy end...!"

To her, I was a god of illness and pestilence. Veronica's glare could almost kill, but I shrugged.

I spoke with confidence. "You think that to earn a parent's love you need to excel in all things, so a straggler like you goes unloved... But is that really true?"

"...What?" Veronica looked at me blankly.

I elaborated. "You lack the courage to believe."

"Believe in what?"

"In yourself. And...you lack the courage to trust your parents' hearts. You desperately lack both. It's a real shame, since you have so much potential and talent."

Veronica latched on to those final words. "Me, talented...? Don't be stupid...! Where do I have any—?"

"Then tell me, Veronica: what is a genius to you? What is 'talent'?"

“Isn’t that obvious? You’re a genius, Ard Meteor. You can do anything with almost no effort...and stand at the top like it’s your birthright...”

“You’re right about that, but there is more than one kind of genius.”

Veronica cocked her head with a puzzled look.

“In my opinion, a genius...is someone who never gives up and puts their full effort into everything they do. I believe those kinds of prodigies are even better than those like me who were born with it. When people don’t see results, they give up. They limit themselves. But, Veronica, you never did.”

Even as she gazed at me, her eyes held nothing. They might never again.

I continued on, nevertheless. “I believe it was inevitable that you accepted the thoughtform’s invitation and sought a shortcut. But even if it hadn’t appeared before you...I’m certain you would have soldiered on without breaking. The method might have been roundabout, but you would have achieved your goal nonetheless.”

“That’s not—”

“Let me continue, Veronica. From what I can tell, you’re a bona fide genius. Forgive me for repeating myself...but those who persevere are the true geniuses. In those terms, you’re sufficiently talented. All you need is the courage to believe. Resist temptation and find the resolve to walk your own path. Then, you can go anywhere.”

I wondered if a single word got through to her.

Life began to return to her eyes. I looked at her with relief and concluded my speech.

“There is one more thing. You should trust your parents’ hearts. Because of your siblings...your elder sister in particular, you’re convinced that stragglers are unlovable, but—”

Her parents came rushing in from the stands.

“Veronica!”

“Are you all right?! Are you hurt?!”

She stared at them in shock. Their conduct and facial expressions were unexpected.

“Why...? Why are you...so concerned about me...?” asked Veronica, visibly confused. She was so convinced her parents didn’t love her that she was unable to figure out their intentions.

“What was all that?”

“How could this happen...?”

Veronica trembled. After a few moments of uncertainty, she spoke up. “Mother, Father...the truth is...!”

This girl was a good person at heart. She could have talked her way out of the situation, but she didn’t. Veronica revealed all the secrets she’d been keeping.

“What...?!”

“That’s...!”

Her parents’ eyes widened, and she turned away from them.

“Please just disown me... Then I’ll take sole responsibility for this. I’ve endangered the lives of not only the other nobility but the royal family, too. I’m certain the death penalty awaits me... But I don’t mind. After all, life no longer holds any value to me.”

“D-do you even hear yourself?!”

“We would never allow you to bear that on your own! If you are sentenced to death, we will die, too!” declared her mother.

Veronica once again became baffled. “How...? How can you say that...? I thought neither of you cared about me... A failure isn’t worthy of love... It doesn’t matter what happens—”

Her mother fell to her knees before her and...slapped her across the cheek.

“...Huh?”

Veronica’s mother stared straight into the eyes of her clueless daughter, who had no clue why she’d been struck.

“No one in this family is a failure,” scolded the mother slowly, to let the words sink in.

Next to them, her father’s gaze turned bitter. “The fault is entirely on my wife and me...!” He looked down at Veronica with regret. “We thought you could read our minds even if we didn’t express ourselves. You’re a determined girl...so we thought it was best to be strict with you. We were convinced that intentionally pushing you away would make you more competitive, but...we were wrong. We’ve pushed you into a corner...! ...I’m sorry...! I’m so sorry, Veronica...!”

“...Father.”

“I realize words aren’t enough. But please allow me to say this: Never once have I considered you a failure. Your positive attitude and efforts have always filled me with pride...! I love you from the bottom of my heart...!”

Tears streamed down his face.

This was Veronica's deepest desire—what she'd wanted since the day she was born.

"Father...! Mother...!"

Her mindset had been distorted. It was all a misunderstanding. She never had parents who rejected their hardworking daughter. Veronica fully accepted this—and her heart was saved.

"I'm sorry...! I'm so sorry...!" She burst into tears and embraced her parents.

Watching them, I let out a sigh of relief. All according to plan. The evil was vanquished, and a poor girl found true happiness. The matter was finally resolved.

As soon as this thought crossed my mind—

"I—I don't get what's going on...but he really is the son of the Great Mages!"

"Y-yeah. I'm just as lost, but we have to reward his efforts."

"The higher nobility won't like it...but we should give him a medal or something."

There was a stir among the royalty in the audience.

*A medal? I'm begging you to stop. If I stick out any more than this, my peaceful life—*

"Wooooow. So you did it *again*. You really *are* the best, huh?"

I heard a cheerful voice and felt a sudden presence behind me. Standing there with a mega-smile was Olivia.

"I can't believe you handled that *all by yourself*."

She placed a hand on each of my shoulders and dug into them with her nails. This had only convinced her more that I was the Demon Lord.

"They're gonna give Ard another medal!"

Irenea was so excited, you'd think she was the one getting it.

"Hee-hee. He'll eventually earn every medal. They really ought to make some custom ones for him." Ginny pressed her hands to her chin, considering names for these hypothetical awards.

"That was pretty swell, Ard! I knew horoscopes were right! The stars got your back!"

...Sylphy's eyes twinkled, and I let out a heavy sigh before turning to Veronica.

“I told you to have the courage to believe, but there’s one thing you must never believe in.”

My weariness was bone deep.

“Never believe in horoscopes.”





My World Remains  
Unchanged in Any Form  
and Silhouette

**Dues to the  
Demon Lord  
Reborn:  
Heart  
Turned  
Mind**

# Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: Heart Turned Mind

## My World Remains Unchanged in Any Form and Silhouette

Classes finished for the day.

“Ah! Another day in the books! My least favorite subjects, but I tried my best! Don’t you think so, Ar—?”

Ireena was blatantly fishing for my praise, but before she could even finish her sentence...

“Daddy!”

“I’m sooo tired!”

Two girls drowned her out as they latched on to me. A pair of adorable twins who were completely identical aside from hair color—Lumi and Lami. They rubbed their cheeks against my chest like puppies snuggling up against their owner.

“Lumi did her best today!”

“Lami worked hard and didn’t fall asleep!”

““Praise us! Praise us!””

I couldn’t ignore such cute pleas. I lightly patted their heads, and they sighed, content.

...On the other hand...

“Nghhh...! After-school praise is *my* special treat...!” Ireena growled in irritation, facing the twins.

“It’s not your god-given right, Miss Ireena... But I must agree that those twins are a bit much. They aren’t serving as members of the harem—but acting like despicable monogamists,” Ginny replied, staring sullenly at the twins.

On the other end of the spectrum...

“It seems like you’re really settling into your new school life! I was kinda worried that things might not work out at first, but it’s all coming up roses!”

An innocent smile broke out across Sylphy’s sweet features.

Like her, I had felt a tinge of doubt. After all, I had no idea if they'd be able to assimilate into our society. Although adorable twins now, they were originally unique creatures known as sprites. After resolving a certain incident, I granted them physical forms and let them reincarnate as mortals. They'd been attending school as humans ever since.

"...Hmm. Speaking of getting settled..." I looked around in search of a certain female student and spotted Carmilla. "It seems like someone isn't there yet."

I quietly sighed as I observed the girl sitting by herself in a corner of the classroom.

Carmilla was another student with an unusual history. Irenea and I had saved her during a certain mission, and she was both the daughter of a demon and a descendent of the Evil Gods. She hadn't opened up to anyone besides us, maybe because of her troubled past. I wanted to help somehow, but it all depended on her. I earnestly wanted her to build solid friendships and live a peaceful life—

*Rumble-rumble-rumble-rumble...*

I heard vibrations coming from the ground. By the time I'd braced myself for whatever was heading our way, it already stopped... I waited for a moment, but nothing happened.

"Wh-what was that just now?"

"Miss Sylphy, did you do something again?"

"N-no! It wasn't me this time!"

Sylphy flailed her hands around and desperately insisted that she was innocent. Unfortunately, none of us could take her word.

"I'm serious! Today is one of the few days I forgot to set my magic tra—"

The classroom door banged open.

"SYLPHYYYYYYYY! WHERE ARE YOU, YOU IDIOOOOOOOOOOOO OT?!?!?"

With a furious roar, a teacher entered the room—a woman with characteristic therianthrope animal ears bristling and eyes burning with a

fiery wrath. Olivia. She was our homeroom teacher and my elder sister of sorts.

Her graceful features were twisted with savagery as she scanned the room.

“I foooooound yoooooou!”

“Aaaah?!”

Olivia charged forward much faster than Sylphy could escape, grabbed the girl by the nape of her thin neck, and started to drag her away.

“B-but I have nothing to do with thiiiiis!”

Sylphy’s cries echoed through the classroom. We all let out a unanimous sigh.

...Soon after Olivia schlepped Sylphy away, Lumi and Lami had business of their own to attend to and left the classroom.

“What should we do, Ard?” Ireena asked.

“I’m sure we can leave Miss Sylphy to her own devices.”

“...No, something feels off. Should we see what’s going on?”

I cast detection magic to figure out where they went—the front of the school gates. We walked across the school grounds and made our way toward them. Groups of students traveled across the campus—ludicrously vast—as the sun slowly set. Everything seemed the same as usual...but it definitely wasn’t. I couldn’t pinpoint the exact reason, but something felt different.

“...Let’s hurry over to them.”

We jogged over to Olivia and Sylphy and reached our destination.

I frowned. “What’s going on? They’ve drawn a crowd.”

“That doesn’t appear to be our only concern.”

“It looks like everyone is in a really bad mood.”

A flood of students were frozen at the gate. Everyone stood in place, making no attempt to pass through.

At the center of this odd crowd...Olivia had forced Sylphy to prostrate on the ground.

“It was you, dammit! Just spit it out!”

“No, I’m telling you! I’m innocent! I don’t remember doing that; I swear!”

Olivia was in a flying rage, and Sylphy was defending herself, face stained with tears.

I approached them with a question. “What’s going on?”

“Ah! Ard! I need your help! Potato Head is bullying me!”

“Who do you think you’re calling Potato Head?! Flattering me isn’t going to work!”

“That wasn’t a compliment!”

I frowned at the riotous pair. “Lady Olivia. What’s all this commotion about?”

“...Hmph. It’s easier to show you,” Olivia answered morosely.

She walked to the gate, passed under it with confidence...and came right back.

“...This is what’s going on.”

“And what is ‘this’ exactly?”

“...Give it a try.”

Although dubious, I did as she said. I walked through the gate to exit the school grounds—or I should have.

“This is...”

I was back on campus.

“Wh-what’s wrong, Ard?”

“He reversed, turning back on his heel as soon as he passed through the gate... Didn’t you notice anything?”

“I reversed?”

I had no memory of turning around. I thought I’d left the school gate.

...I tried to exit the Academy again, but the result was the same. As soon as I passed through the gate, I was instantly brought back to the school grounds.

“Maybe it’s some form of magic. But I don’t sense any power emitting from it. If it’s not magic, then what could it be...?”

Although my life in ancient times had been a long one, I didn’t have much experience with this. I hadn’t felt this perplexed in a long time, and Olivia next to me scowled at Sylphy.

“It’s not just the school gate. There aren’t any exits—period. Anyone who tries gets sent straight back here before they can even figure out what’s going on. It’s like our own choices are being reversed,” she growled.

“Y-you can look at me all you want! But I swear I don’t have a clue what’s going on!”

*Hmm. “Reversed,” huh?*

So it could be described as a reversal phenomenon. But what purpose would that serve? What could be accomplished by keeping everyone locked inside the school?

...At any rate, I only had one option.

“Lady Olivia, it would be best to work under the assumption that there are suspects besides Sylphy. It won’t do any good to scold her now.”

“...What makes you think that, Ard Meteor? Got any leads?”

“Nothing at the moment, unfortunately. We should interview witnesses and gather information. Questioning each student is the only way to find clues.”

“Hmph. I’m already losing patience.”

“We should prepare ourselves for a long fight, but only slow and steady will—”

—*win the race*, I was about to say when the rumbling picked up again.

*Rumble-rumble-rumble-rumble...*

An instant later...my vision grew dark.

*...How long have I been out?*

An intoxicated sort of dizziness overtook me, and before I could even stop myself...

“Nngh,” I cried out, struck by an odd sensation.

*What the...? Was that my voice?*

It sounded a bit higher than usual...

Also, what was going on with my body? It felt weirdly light, but my chest was heavy like there was a weight on my shoulders... And my legs were cold. They felt bare.

*What is going—?*

“Hey. Hey, is that you, Ard?”

I could tell just by the tone that it was Ireena, but not in the pitch I knew. It sounded husky, like an adolescent boy whose voice was on the cusp of breaking.

I opened my eyes, head heavy on my shoulders, and saw...

“N-ngh...”

“O-owie. My head...”

Rubbing their temples with their eyes still closed were Sylphy and Ginny... No, they were guys who looked like them.

The student resembling Ginny was androgynous and beautiful and could easily pass as her younger brother. The other one was exactly Sylphy but with a more masculine face. Both wore the boys' school uniform. Plus, their voices seemed to cement this theory, but...

“...What the hell's going on?” A deep and commanding voice seemed to rumble low in my ears. I turned toward the voice next to me.

Standing there was a therianthrope man oozing sex appeal. His limber frame was covered in light armor, and glossy black hair flowed down his back.

As soon as I saw him...his image overlapped with a certain person.

...*No way.* I broke out in a cold sweat as I contemplated my one theory. *Please let me be wrong.*

Despite my wishes—

“Hey. Don't tell me you're Ard Meteor,” said the therianthrope man with a look of wonder.

“Gaaaaaah! It's gone! M-my thing is gone!”

“Eeeeeek! What *is* this? Why is this thing hanging off me?!”

I looked around at the other students.

“It can't be...! We're really...!”

My voice was oddly high. Not only that...my suspicions were confirmed as I noticed those soft additions to my chest and realized that something was missing.

“H-hey, Ard. Did we really...?”

I turned toward the owner of the voice, eyes taking in somebody who almost looked like Ireena...

No. Ireena in a male form *was* standing in front of me.

“Did we really change sexes...?!” Ireena spoke my mind.

“Th-that can't be...! H-how could I possibly become another sex before I got to know the *pleasures* that come with my female body...?!” Ginny cried, bursting into tears.

“It feels weird down there. Do you all have to live like this? Can't say I'm a fan,” Sylphy said with a frown as she looked down at her groin.

Everyone seemed more or less confused...but I managed not to panic,

perhaps because of all my various trials and tribulations in life.

The same couldn't be said for most of the other students.

"I—I can't get married anymore...!"

"My treasuuuuuure...! Please come baaaaack...!"

In front of the gate glowing in the light of the setting sun, the students began freaking out. And in the middle of all this...a portion of the boys in female forms turned in our direction and murmured under their breaths.

"Is—is that Ireena?"

"And is that Ginny...next to her?"

"M-my Sylphy has turned into a cute little boy...!"

"...I'd still sleep with Lady Olivia."

Their opinions finally turned to me.

"Hey, who's that hot chick?"

"Waist-length black hair...tiny waist...and perfect knockers...!"

"She kinda looks like Ard..."

"You can't be serious...! *That's* what he would look like...?!"

"My thing might be gone from between my legs, but I'm getting hard, mentally...!"

The boys in their female forms looked at me like a pack of wild beasts. They weren't the only ones.

"Huh? You're kidding. Is that Ard?"

"H-he's adorable...! Ard...no, Ardette? So cute...!"

"Th-that's strange. I know we're both girls, but my heart is beating out of my chest...!"

The girls in their male forms were staring at me with a dangerous glint in their eyes. Before I knew it, everyone who had been wailing only moments before now set their sights on me...



“I think I’m starting to like this new body.”

“Hey. Now I can do all sorts of things with this new Ardette. I love being in this male form.”

“Maybe I’ll find a chance to pin her down...! Hee-hee-hee-hee...!”

*Crap.* A certain phrase echoed in my mind. It was like I’d just been transported back to my old life, and I recalled the daily trauma of shiteheads eyeing me up and down as they tried to get some ass.

And now I was back to where I started...!

“...Lady Olivia, I mentioned before that we should prepare for a long battle. I take it back. We should resolve this as quickly as possible—no matter the cost.”

“...Yeah, I hear you.” She seemed uncomfortable with her current form and gave a solid nod.

I set out to restore my peaceful life as a boy—



Vowing to clear up this problem at hyperspeed, I raced around the school with Ireena and my other new guy friends. We put every effort into gathering information and eyewitness accounts, but unsurprisingly, it wasn’t long before we came up empty.

*What if we have to stay like this forever?*

...I was off my game—perhaps because I’d taken on this new form—compared to usual.

“Don’t worry, Ard! I know we’ll crack the case!”

I got the impression that Ireena—Ireeno, I guessed—seemed almost sharper than usual. Her speech was still feminine, but those chiseled features looked so manly...

Why did she—er, *he*—make my heart race?

“Huh? What’s wrong, Ard? You’re blushing.”

“I-it’s nothing.”

“...This doesn’t look good. We must resolve the issue immediately.” A dark shadow cast on the androgynous face of Ginny (or Gin), who looked handsome, almost.

*Is—is this what some girls think about...?! This is bad...! This is really bad...!* Soon enough, I wouldn’t see them the same way...! I was desperately

hoping for some sort of clue, but everyone gave the same answer—even after I interviewed a dozen, then two dozen students.

“I’m not really sure... By the way, you’re looking *adorable*, Ardette. Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee.”

Talking was getting us nowhere.

*Rumble-rumble-rumble-rumble...*

The reversal phenomenon created even more problems.

Day and night swapped next, so the afternoon became morning. Our taste buds were rearranged, so spicy food tasted sweet and vice versa. One new reversal was followed by another...and the school was starting to panic.

“One good thing is that there are no casualties...but I don’t know what will happen next...!” I exclaimed.

I grilled every last person for both the sake of this world and, more importantly, my life. At long last, we came across some useful information. And the one who provided it...was a student in the library.

The library was normally a quiet space, but with everything going on, it was a little chaotic. I called out to one student who quickly caught my eye.

“Um. You’re Carmilla, right?”

“Y-yes. And you’re...Ard?” timidly asked the beautiful white-haired male, who looked powerful and had a measured tone.

*My heart can’t handle the juxtaposition.*

...My mind felt like it was thinking like a girl might, but I somehow focused and questioned Carmilla.

“Did you notice anything strange today? Anything unrelated to our current predicament is perfectly fine. I would like to hear about any bizarre instances.”

“...I—I came here soon after the commotion started. I remembered reading about a very similar event in a history book recently... I—I thought it might be useful to you, Ard, but...”

She’d apparently forgotten the title and was currently searching at random.

“Th-ther-ther is something else, although I don’t know if it will be much help...”

“That’s fine. Please tell me whatever you know.”

“O-okay. There was a commotion among the students in another class about a door that never opens in the dungeon entrance...”

“‘A door that never opens’?”

“Do you remember how we defeated a Minotaur in the dungeon soon after I entered the Academy?”

“...Ah, you must mean the door we found while conducting Ginny’s private lessons.”

“You were as cool as the Demon Lord when you did that, Ard!” Ginny exclaimed, blushing as she wriggled about. It was normally cute...but watching her do it in this body felt weird.

That aside, we already knew where this mysterious door was. Ireena, Ginny, and I had previously entered the depths of the dungeon and defeated a Minotaur boss on one of the levels. We had spotted the giant door on our way back...but were unable to open it at the time.

“I remember being told the door wouldn’t open without an Alumatite Key,” mused Ireena.

“Does anyone have one? ...By the way, what *is* an Alumatite Key?” questioned Ginny.

“Beats me, but is this happening because someone opened the door?” Sylphy tilted her head, and the others followed suit.

I put a hand to my now narrow chin and confirmed our present situation. “The clues are scarce, but we’ll keep up our investigation under the assumption that this door is to blame. Thank you for your help, Carmilla.”

“It—it may take me some time to find that other piece of information... but I’ll do my best...! For you, Ard...and for everyone else...!”

Looking fired up, Carmilla returned to checking the books lined along the shelves.

“What should we do now?”

“An excellent question. For now—” I was about to answer Ireena.

“Daddy!”

“Where are you?!”

...Unfamiliar voices called out in familiar tones. I turned toward the library entrance and saw...

“Is that you, Lumi and Lami?”

...Two sprites turned human. The reversal phenomenon seemed to have

affected them...and they were now two cute little boys. Their features were still as sweet as ever, but their frames were much wider than their female forms.

*...Do some girls' hearts race at anything remotely beautiful?* I was getting creeped out at myself as my heart started to beat faster.

Lumi and Lami looked at me and tilted their heads.

"Is that you, Daddy?"

"Should we call you Mommy?"

"...That doesn't matter. It's me, Ard Meteor. There's no question about that."

They broke out in brilliant smiles.

"We finally found you!!"

"Mommy!!"

They jumped at me like puppies greeting their owner.

"You're so soft, Mommy!"

"And your boobies are so big!"

The twins buried their faces in my soft and plushy chest.

*...This is a strange feeling. Are these maternal instincts?*

A chill ran through me as I realized I was acting more girly. I faced the twins.

"Y-you sound like you've been looking for me. Is something wrong?"

"Ah, right, right."

"Um, about the weird stuff going on."

"It's probably 'cause of the dungeon."

"We sensed something bad there earlier."

"Yup."

Lumi and Lami sounded so casual, despite the gravity of the situation.

"Where exactly did you sense the bad feeling?" I asked.

"Um, it was pretty far down."

"We were curious, so we went to check it out. Then—"

At that moment, as if trying to interrupt them...

*Rumble-rumble-rumble-rumble...*

The noise started up again. A second later, the unthinkable happened.

Our vision reversed. Up was down, down was up, and...

We all dropped to what used to be the ceiling. Lumi, Lami, and I landed safely, but the others banged their heads pretty hard.

“Gah?!”

“Aaaah?!”

“Eeep?!”

I guessed it was good news that gentle yips were all that came from that. The three tearily rubbed their heads. I was worried about them, of course... but there were other concerns at hand.

“If the world has been flipped upside down, then...!”

A worst-case scenario was playing through my mind...

“Aaaah?!”

“I-I’m faaaalling!”

From a window nearby, I could hear multiple cries echoing outside. I flinched as I looked out the window. Sure enough, the scene was as disastrous as I expected. Now that the world was literally flipped over, the earth was the sky...and the sky was the earth.

It was therefore inevitable that everyone still outside would drop down into the blue sky.

“So the worst has already come...!”

Faced with the worst-case scenario I’d anticipated since the very beginning, I let out a heavy sigh and cast my magic. The first spell was detection magic that pinpointed each student and teacher on campus. After that, I cast flight magic on everyone outside. This would keep them from falling into the sky. I reworked the spell so individuals could control their levitation to a certain degree and find refuge inside the school on their own.

“*Phew...* The staff and students should be safe for now,” I murmured before turning to the twins. “Let’s continue from where we left off. Was the place you visited...a locked door, perhaps?”

“Uh-huh, sure was.”

“It was open when we got to it!”

“...I see. That settles it, then.”

These incidents were undeniably connected to the locked door. Mortal or otherwise, some unknown force had opened it...and brought us to our present situation.

“Our main issue is whatever was hiding behind the door. Is it now in

someone's possession? Where are they now? We must consider these three points."

"Perhaps the principal or Lady Olivia would know what was in there?"

"Yes, that is a possibility... Lumi, Lami, please assist Carmilla. The rest of us will go speak with the principal and Lady Olivia."

"Okay!"

"We'll do our best, Mommy!"

As Carmilla and the waving twins saw us off, we hurried to the people at the forefront of our minds. I used the detection spell from earlier to locate the principal and Lady Olivia. They seemed to be outside. Using flight magic, Ireena, Ginny, Sylphy, and I raced into the sky.

We soon spotted Olivia, in her male form, who seemed to be assisting students who hadn't yet evacuated inside.

...Next to her, a lovely, unfamiliar woman was floating in midair as she worked alongside our instructor.

Who *was* she?

The woman in question looked over at me. "Oh my... Is that you, Ard? And Ireena, Ginny, and Sylphy next to you?"

"Yes, that's correct...but may I ask who you might be?"

"Oh? Don't you recognize me? It's me. Golde, your academy principal."

...*Tell me you're joking.* I wasn't the only one thinking this. Ireena and the others had the same exact expressions.

How did a bald old man creaking ever closer to senility end up a bombshell? I couldn't help but feel life was one big mystery.

"...Ard Meteor. Do you have some business with us?"

"A-ah yes. There are a few things I wish to ask."

I questioned both Olivia and Golde about the locked door in great detail. The gorgeous principal folded his arms and groaned.

"Hmm. That door was around before I became tenured here. I don't have much to tell you, but I was warned the door must never be opened. And the one who told me this was..."

Golde glanced over at Olivia, a handsome man with folded arms and a conflicted expression.

"That's right... But that was a long time ago, unfortunately. It'll take me a while to remember," Olivia replied with a frown as she looked up at the ground that was now above us.

Just as I was thinking about how cool she looked, which made me feel weird...

"...I remember now. So that's what happened. I'm sure of it," Olivia mumbled in understanding.

"...Might we hear your thoughts?"

"Yeah. It all started about a thousand years ago. Verda made a certain magic device."

*Verda.* I felt a sense of dread. Ireena, Ginny, and Sylphy seemed to share my sentiment.

Verda Al-Hazard. One of the former Heavenly Kings who served my army. Her entire character could be summed up as...a perverted mad scientist.

"The device itself has a lot going on, and it'd take forever to explain. However...its effect is as basic as basic gets. It seriously messes with the universe and distorts emotion and reason."

"In other words, it reverses phenomena and concepts?"

"Right... If she'd just made a simpler design, this wouldn't even be happening."

"...What do you mean?"

"First of all—the machine looks like a person."

"A person?"

"Yeah. It's made to look like a 'beautiful elf woman,' and the controls are run by an artificially created sprite contained inside."

"...Aaaah." At this point, I already knew the punch line.

...Incidentally, artificial sprites were exactly what they sounded like. They were items created by magic scholars that replicated sprites like Lumi and Lami. Most could only follow preset commands...but anything Verda made was far beyond the usual.

"Her artificial sprite is highly advanced. Not in a good way, of course. It has the same cognitive abilities as a person and acts independently outside preset commands. And one day, it went berserk for some reason."

"...Aaaah."

"It was a lot like what's happening right now. We somehow managed to shut down the device and seal it in the dungeon below the Academy... But now, after a thousand years, it's back." Olivia sighed deeply, trying to convey that this was a pain.

Ireena looked at her and raised an eyebrow.

“But why was the seal broken? Who was it, and why’d they do it?”

As we began to contemplate her questions...

“It’s *all* thanks to you, Ard Meteor!”

A new voice rang out of nowhere, and we all turned our heads.

Floating in the cloudless sky below us was a single girl. She looked our age, maybe around fifteen years old, in a revealing outfit that flaunted her tan skin... Her bare hands and feet glared with a white-hot incandescence. She was a strange amalgamation of synthetic and human.

Her identity was obvious.

“You’re the magic device that we’re talking about, I presume?”

“Yup. Call me Nemesis, ’kay?”

“...Well then, Nemesis. Could you explain what you said just a moment ago?”

Nemesis cackled. “You heard me. Thanks for lettin’ me out of there.”

“I don’t recall doing that.”

“Well, yeah, I guess you wouldn’t. It was kinda not on purpose.”

“...What do you mean?”

“All that banging around you’ve been doing in the dungeon lately loosened the seal on the door.”

...Ack. Olivia’s piercing glare stabbed right through me.

“It’s your responsibility, Ard Meteor,” Olivia growled.

“Um, well, I do apologize,” I said to Nemesis. I was starting to sweat. “Please stop what you are doing and return the reversed phenomena to—”

“No way. I’m havin’ too much fun to stop now.”

““Fun”?”

“Yup. I love seeing everyone panicking. This is totally awesome.”

“...I see. Could that brain of yours still be running wild?”

I couldn’t tell if she heard my mumbled comment. Nemesis’s lips twisted into a half-moon.

“Ard Meteorrrr. I’m grateful, y’know. As a sign of my gratitude...I’ll give you a hard time before sending you off to the other world, ’kay?”

Nemesis’s voice dripped with malice, and magic circles cropped up

around her.

“She’s equipped with offensive capabilities?”

“Yeah, Verda was into that sort of thing,” Olivia explained.

“Well, that certainly is something...” I sighed...

“HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA! DIIIE!”

A magical barrage consisting of all five major elements came raining down on us. I cast a defensive spell over everyone present, and a semitransparent orb materialized to protect them. The enemy’s flurry of attacks crashed head-on into the bulwark and instantaneously disappeared.

This really was Verda’s handiwork apparently. My shield already had a crack in it.

“...Principal Golde. Lady Olivia. Please evacuate everyone inside the school. I’ll deal with her.”

No objections were raised. The group quickly followed Olivia and the principal and cleared the area. I was now free to fight as I pleased... Or so I thought.

“Hey, don’t think you can get away that easy.” Nemesis flashed me a wicked smile and began to sparkle a split second later. The rumbling sound soon began anew, and—

“H-huh?!”

“W-weren’t we in the school just now?”

“...I see. We’ve been blocked.”

Ireena and the others stood confused in front of the building’s entrance. Only Olivia and I realized what was going on.

“You’ve reversed their desired actions, I take it?”

“You got it. I’ll even throw in a bonus.” Nemesis’s entire body glowed once more, and the rumbling started back up. “Ard Meteorrrr. Aren’t these kids important to you?”

Nemesis’s lips twisted into another half-moon, and multiple circles appeared around her a second later. Soon after, magic attacks came shooting out of them.

But not at me. They were aimed at Ireena, Ginny, and Sylphy.

“...Leave it to me.”

Olivia faced the oncoming attacks with lightning speed. She stepped forward to shield the three girls, unsheathed her blade, and sliced at a rate of over a hundred times per second. Normally, every bit of magic that Nemesis

could dish out would have disappeared under Olivia's skilled swordplay, but...

"Ngh...!"

For some reason, a portion of the magic failed to vanish and struck Olivia directly. Masses of rock crashed into her body and sent the therianthrope mercilessly flying.

"L-Lady Olivia?!"

"...Stay focused. I'm not that hurt." A stream of fresh blood dripped down her forehead.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! How do you like that, Ard Meteor?! Upsetting, isn't it?! Seeing them get hurt bothers you, right?!"

"...You think you can upset me with *that*?"

To be honest, I wasn't flustered in the least. Nemesis's cheeks puffed out at my indifference.

"Hmmm. In that case...I guess I'll have to keep attacking until you are!"

Another array of magic circles unleashed a torrent of attacks. Unsurprisingly, her targets were still Ireena and the others.

"I won't allow that."

I constructed a technique of my own and cast a protective spell over everyone. *Mega Wall* was an impregnable fortress packed with dozens of layers. Normally, nothing stood a chance of breaking past it...but as soon as Nemesis's attacks hit it head-on, the force field shattered as it counteracted the enemy.

Ireena and the others...seemed to be okay somehow.

As I checked on them, I mumbled briefly to myself. "...Hmph, I see. So that's it."

My wall—completely indestructible under normal circumstances—had been pulverized. Olivia and I already figured out the trick to it...but Ireena and Ginny didn't seem to have a clue.

"Y-you're joking, right...?!"

"W-wasn't that last spell an incredibly powerful one? For it to crumble so easily..."

Observing their confusion, a grin came to Nemesis's lips as if she'd already won.

"I can't take all the credit. In all honesty, I'm super-weak. But Ard Meteor...that's exactly why you can't beat me." she mused scornfully.

I maintained my cool as I alluded to her little trick.

“It...has to do with reversing the roles of the weak and strong, correct?”

Her smile deepened. “Bingo! The strong become the weak! And the weak become the strong! So I’m the most powerful one here! No one stands a chance against me!”

Nemesis thrust her chest out while the others started to panic.

“The strong become the weak, and the weak become the strong...?!”

“The stronger you are, the weaker you become...! At this rate, she’ll be Ard’s greatest threat...!”

As Ireena and Ginny saw it, Nemesis’s powers broke all the rules. Their expressions made it clear that they could see no path to victory, making them feel desperate.

Although faint, there was a streak of doubt in Olivia, my big sister of sorts.

“...Need any help, Ard Meteor?”

I smiled at her offer and shook my head. “No. That won’t be necessary, Lady Olivia.”

“...But you won’t win at this rate.”

“You’re right. I have no chance. That’s why—” I looked from Olivia to Nemesis. “I’ll resolve the situation without winning.”

My voice was brimming with confidence, but to Nemesis, I must have sounded like a loser who didn’t know when to quit.

“Keh-keh-keh-keh-keh! Resolve it if you can!”

A deluge of attack magic came flying at me. My smile never faded.

“You seem to think strength alone determines victory. However...”

I faced my self-assured foe with my own brand of confidence.

“I, Ard Meteor, shall teach you that anyone with that attitude is inferior.”

As the attack closed in on me...I purposefully did nothing. Inevitably, it was a direct hit. Lightning struck my innards; flames burned my skin. Icicles pierced my entire body. Rocks crushed my bones.

“Keh-keh-keh-keh-keh! You were just tryin’ to act cool, huh? Faaail!” Nemesis cackled.

However, an instant later...she noticed a strangeness in the space around

her, and that smile soon faded. “That’s weird. It’s too quiet. Something’s going—”

Her words were cut off, and a drastic shift began. The inverted campus slowly began to warp...and become a completely different space altogether.

There was nothing but white. White as far as the eye could see. As if traveling back in time, my body started to become whole once more.

“Wh-what did you do, Ard Meteor?!”

Nemesis felt nervous for the first time, and she unleashed more of her magic. In return, I did nothing. I just let it hit me without defending or counterattacking. And yet again, my body was pulverized.

However, a moment later...my wounds healed as if time had turned back on itself.

“Wh-what...?! What did you do...?!”

Nemesis was now really irritated, and I grinned at her.

“You and I are currently sealed within an Eigen Space. Time is fixed here. Both of us will remain in perfect health. Even if we are injured, we’ll soon return to normal. Just as you saw a moment ago.”

I smiled gently and continued. “I cannot beat you. However, at the same time...you cannot defeat me in this space. Our only option here...is to talk it out.”

“Talk it out...?!”

“Yes. You’re running wild at the moment, and I will do my best to persuade you until you’re back to your usual self.”

“Keh! Keh-keh-keh-keh-keh! You’re dumb. You think I’d actually agree —”

“I agree it’s probably pointless, but I shall do my best at any rate. After all, we have plenty of time. You might say we have...an eternity.”

I must have had a disquieting smile, because Nemesis’s composure broke for the second time.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You heard me. Time is permanently fixed here, and it has no effect on the outside. In other words...no matter how much time passes, it will seem like nothing more than an instant to the outside world. Therefore...”

I spoke in a perfectly relaxed and mild tone.

“I will continue to persuade you until you return to normal. Even if it takes ten billion years...or more.”

Finally realizing the situation she was in, Nemesis called off her attacks.

“Violence is not the only way to end a fight. It’s possible to talk it out on occasion. You might say our current predicament is a textbook example of that.”

Unlike Nemesis slick in sweat, I beamed at her as I made my offer.

“Well then, shall we get started?”



I had prepared myself for a long haul of a hundred million years or so...but Nemesis returned to normal surprisingly fast. It only took 240,018 years. The pace worked to my advantage. Everything returned to normal as soon as we arrived back in the real world...

And now, we were back to our usual lives.

In our classroom at the Academy, we prepared to head to the dining hall for lunch. Just then...

“Master! I, Nemesis, have made lunch for you today!”

...It would be a bit inaccurate to say *everything* was the same as before. More specifically, there was a new addition to the class.

Nemesis.

When deciding on how to deal with the artificial sprite after she stopped going crazy, I felt bad sealing her away again. So I became her supervisor of sorts. As a result, Nemesis was now a student of the Academy, and I was keeping her constantly at my side to make sure she stayed out of trouble. However...

Was this her original self, or did our discussion unscrew some bolts in her head?

Nemesis now called me “Master” and diligently hovered over me like some kind of servant.

“Oh. There are breadcrumbs on your mouth, Master. I’ll wipe them away

for you!”

“...Why are you getting so close to my face?”

“To wipe them away with my tongue!”

“...I’ll pass. I can do it myself.”

Ireena and Ginny clearly didn’t appreciate Nemesis’s clinginess.

“Can’t we do something about that?”

“I’m in the middle of devising a plan to toss her into the garbage. Please give me a bit more time.”

Meanwhile, among the boys...

“He’s done it again.”

“Damn, I’m jealous.”

Not too long ago, they had been burning with murderous rage...but lately their gazes had been strangely lukewarm. There was one reason for this...

“Ardette was seriously a cutie.”

“Maybe he can transform into that body again. Let’s ask Nemesis.”

“No way; he’s hot the way he is. After everything that’s happened, I think I can see why Ard is so popular.”

...There you have it. I gained a new friend *and* new problems. A thought bubbled up from the depths of my soul.

*Why did things turn out this way?*



May There Be  
World Peace

## Prelude of the Endangered

## Prelude of the Endangered

### May There Be World Peace

In the far ancient era, humanity was enslaved by higher beings. Because of the incredible power the Outer Ones and their followers possessed—magic—the people were forced to concede against their will. They eked out miserable lives as slaves, then died.

That was, until history finally ceased to repeat itself, and a savior appeared before them.

His name was Varvatos, the first mortal mage. He had created a magic language specifically for humanity and shared his knowledge with the world. That was how the oppressed started launching a counterattack.

Varvatos told them that humanity could regain its sovereignty, and the masses gathered under him to form the first rebel army. From then on, he and his forces pressed forward with incredible might, which sparked interest in the creation of second and third rebel armies. The world had plunged into full-on war.

...After many months and years, humanity still hadn't managed to fulfill its dearest wish. There were two primary reasons for this.

First, not every person was united in their desire to transform the world. A portion of humanity had accepted the Outer Ones as the superior race and climbed the ladder to decent roles in society. They sneered at the rebel armies that threatened the status quo. The revolution was obstructed by the Outer Ones' powers and the lack of human capital.

The biggest contributor, however, was that *the savior of humankind, the catalyst behind this plan, had betrayed them for the enemy.*

Varvatos was the traitor who started it all.

And now he was nothing more than the Outer Ones' dog.



Central Elmenera was a region under the Outer Ones' control. It served as the heart of the economy and maintained a large distribution network. If Elmenera was taken over by some chance, it would spell financial devastation for the entire continent.

This was precisely why the area was constantly targeted by rebel armies and forever burning with the flames of war. The Outer Ones themselves didn't have a stake in the economy, but their followers and supporters would find an attack on the economy disastrous.

A delay in the circulation of goods would have a major impact on food supplies. It didn't matter if the humans were followers of the Outer Ones or not; neither could do anything if they were starving. Since weakening the enemy was vital in war, the rebel army focused their resources on attacking the region.

The army's goal, however, was yet to be realized. And it likely never would be achieved.

That was because the one defending every strategic position was a mage, a first among humankind and the strongest one of all, Varvatos himself.

He was currently in the midst of commanding his army.

Their camp was set up in the middle of a vast plain. It was built to look like a small-scale fortress. From the inside, a host of voices bellowed angrily.

The wounded were being transported from the front lines with teleportation magic as they shrieked in pain. Medical teams raced around in a frantic effort to save them.

As he watched all this play out, Varvatos remained in the camp and dealt with reports on the battle situation. The front lines kept him up-to-date via telepathic communication. He filtered through all their messages simultaneously and issued the best course of action.

"Unit Two will attack the left flank. The enemy has to be getting exhausted by now. Tear through their defenses and don't let up. Unit Six will remain on standby. Wait on my orders and resist the urge to charge in... Hey, Roxanne, how many times do I have to warn you not to get ahead of

yourself? Contain yourself.”

Upon wrapping up his responses, Varvatos shifted back in his legless chair and let out a heavy sigh. A single knight approached him.

“Your Majesty, I’ve brought some herb tea and pastries for you.”

The man wheeling in a tray was named Rivelg. He was one of Varvatos’s close aides and his right-hand man. When the commander saw this handsome figure—lovingly called “the knight of roses” by the masses—he exhaled an audible breath of relief.

“You know me well. That’s exactly what I was in the mood for.”

“I am delighted by your response,” Rivelg replied, blushing as he bowed.

Varvatos began scarfing down the tea and pastries.

“Yep. Sugar is the best fix for the tired mind.”

Mouth full of treats, Varvatos visibly relaxed his strained expression. There were no traces of his nervousness from earlier. He looked almost as lovely as a maiden.

His natural beauty and innocent smile healed the heart of the knight of roses. It even touched the injured soldiers and medics on the front line.

“His Majesty is smiling...!”

“What a marvelous sight...!”

“I’d die for him any day...!”

The tiniest pieces of their hearts melted.

At that moment, Varvatos heard a new telepathic voice.

*“Var...! Can you hear me...?!”*

It was his big sister of sorts, the knight Olivia. He could detect a hint of pain in her voice, and a second later...a massive explosion rumbled in the far distance.

“It—it can’t be!”

“It’s them! They’re coming!”

Amid the chaos, Varvatos rose from his chair and gazed westward. There was no question that the intermittent blasts were heading closer toward them.

*“I’m sorry...! They got past me again...!”* Olivia exclaimed, voice tortured.

“Aaaaaaaaargh!”

As soon as the savage scream boomed close to them, the small wall separating the camp from the outside was obliterated.

A swarm of soldiers rushed into the main camp.

“Th-they’re here!”

“They breached the front lines again!”

“R-run! We’ll get in His Majesty’s way if we stay here!”

The medics hauled off the injured, retreating at full speed. Not a single person engaged the invading army. They had realized during previous battles that they’d be nothing more than a nuisance if they tried to fight.

One person, however—the close aide and knight of roses, Rivelg—unsheathed the sword at Varvatos’s side.

“I’ll deal with the followers. Your Majesty—go take care of that woman.”

“...I’ll leave this to you.”

For the second time in his life, Varvatos faced her—a beautiful elven woman with flowing silver hair, scowling at him.

Lydia Beginsgate. The core of the rebel forces.

There was fury in her heavenly features. Gripping her silver blade, she went straight for him. Varvatos faced his approaching foe and summoned his custom weapon, a magic sword of his own making known as Wyrn Tepes.

As soon as he was armed with his ominous dark blade, the distance between them closed, and their swords clashed violently.

“You again, sickly Powderpuff?!”

“...Get out of my way, you chalky idiot,” I snarled.

The two locked weapons and glared at each other, the friction causing sparks.

“I’m winning this time!”

Lydia focused her power on both legs and unleashed an impossible amount of power, which sent Varvatos’s delicate frame flying. This was when the real battle began.

“Come at me, dimwit.”

“Who are *you* calling dimwit?!”

The two pale fighters went at it hard.

Meanwhile, their subordinates were battling, dipping into the last of their energy reserves.

“The knight of roses...! I can see why he’s the right-hand man of that monster...!”

“C’mon! We gotta protect Lydie!”

Rivelg took on several enemies by himself at once. A jack-of-all-trades, he was both a master swordfighter and a skilled mage who served as a

cornerstone for the Heavenly Kings, who were at the top of the chain of command. His powers were not of this world. The enemy soldiers who fought him were mighty in their own right, but Rivelg was a beast who could defeat them by himself.

“My goal for today is taking one or two of you down, bare minimum.”

As Rivelg pushed forward with his attacks...Varvatos was locked in a defensive stance.

“Take thaaaaaaaat!”

Blows rained down on him like a storm, which he deftly blocked. During their fight, he observed his opponent and searched for an opportunity.

...Normally, it was standard practice to keep your distance from any opponent skilled in close combat. Varvatos was well aware of this. In these types of battles, it was best to maintain a fixed space and attack with long-range magic.

When up against Lydia, however, that course of action turned into one’s worst nightmare.

And so—

“Ngh! Now! Take this, Lydia!”

Rivelg had let an enemy soldier sneak past him, and the combatant had cast attack magic. Sharp ice arrows went ripping through the air.

But they weren’t aimed at Varvatos.

The target was the enemy commander Lydia.

This absurd maneuver would stun anyone who had never witnessed this before. Even Varvatos had squinted at it in scrutiny, but now that he realized what was going on—

“Tch! You think I’d let that happen?!”

He tried to divert it and foil his opponent’s plans, but...

“*Hah!* Actually, I’m pretty sure you *will!*”

Lydia jumped back and sneered before shouting her chant.

“*Cell Vidiyas. Become a Source of Fear!*”

An instant later, the sword in her hand radiated a dazzling light—and the rush of ice arrows were absorbed into the blade. Then...

“Aw yeah! Let’s get this party started!”

Lydia launched forward in a ferocious fervor. Her foot dug into the ground, and clods of earth flew past them. The enemies closed in on each another once again, blades clashing.

“The Holy Sword. So you’ve brought out a real weapon...!”

A Holy Sword.

The name of the silver blade in Lydia’s hand was Vald-Galgulus. Created in the far ancient era, it was a weapon powerful enough to bring down gods and was known as the Mage Destroyer. This Vald-Galgulus could absorb magic attacks and convert them into power for the sword’s wielder.

That’s what made it the Mage Destroyer. It was counterproductive to use magic against someone brandishing the Holy Sword. Not only that, but your spells would also become part of your opponent’s powers.

During their first fight, Varvatos had been unaware of this, so he had employed bold moves from the start—and it nearly led to his downfall.

However...

“That moment was your first and last opportunity. Allow me to prove it to you.”

Varvatos slowly bent his knees while enduring Lydia’s relentless assault

—  
“Graaaaaah!”

Just as she waved the sword above her head...

“HAH!” Varvatos rushed in on her.

Lydia’s Holy Sword cleaved down into his shoulder...but the blade did not slice through him.

If the center of the blade had struck him, Varvatos’s delicate frame would have been split clean in half. But with Lydia and Varvatos so close, only the base of the blade, the part with the most volatile power, had cut through his skin.

Therefore, the Holy Sword cut into his shoulder only the slightest bit—and stopped.

Only for an instant. The merest fraction of an instant. It wasn’t even enough time for a full blink, and yet...

It was more than enough for Varvatos.

“Nngh!”

As the two separated once more, he struck his foe in the solar plexus with the hilt of his sword.

“Gragh?!”

Lydia coughed up blood from the impressive hit, and she went soaring through the air. The strength in Varvatos’s arms was far greater than his

slender frame suggested. Lydia's innards had erupted with that last attack, and the impact had shattered her ribs.

As proof, Lydia continued to vomit blood as she fell to her hands and knees on the bare earth.

*Lose the battle to win the war.*

Varvatos had put these ancient words into action. He pointed the tip of his black blade at Lydia.

"You're an amateur with the sword. A skirmish—especially one that's as simple and clumsy as this—can't kill me."

After he explained the reason for her defeat, Varvatos slowly stepped forward.

To claim the prized head of his enemy.

However...a young girl materialized next to Lydia, who kept coughing up blood.

She must have used teleportation magic. She glared at Varvatos for the barest of seconds, and without launching a single attack...

"...Let's go," she murmured.

The girl, Lydia, and the soldiers Rivelg had been fighting instantly disappeared.

"...Guess they got away this time."

Varvatos looked at the pool of Lydia's blood and sighed. Rivelg spoke in muted tones.

"Perhaps it would be more accurate to say you *let* them get away."

The knight's eyes seemed to be testing him in some way. Varvatos purposefully ignored him and stared up at the azure sky.

He let out another sigh.



Lydia Beginsgate was the central figure that united the rebel armies spread across the world. At present, she was leading her forces in an effort to overtake the most vital of cities under the Outer Ones' control. They would essentially gain control of the continent's entire economic network if successful. If that happened, the scales would tip in the rebel armies' favor, and Lydia would get a boost in popularity for leading them. People might be inspired by her story and join the revolution...which would pose some

problems for the Outer Ones and their followers.

Varvatos didn't feel a shred of pride that he was successful in shielding his overlords from the inconvenience of dealing with the rebellion. He had simply completed an *unpleasant* order. Nothing more, nothing less.

...After Lydia withdrew, the rest of the rebel army began to flee, and Varvatos's army emerged victorious. With the situation resolved, there was no reason to tarry any longer. After a bit of preparation, they departed for home.

Under the orange sky, the group of soldiers traversed the quiet plain. By their cheerful demeanor, no one could have ever guessed they'd just engaged in a bloody battle.

"Hell, Lydia's army sure is strong."

"But they're no match for us. After all, we've got His Majesty in all his glory."

The soldiers were making small talk, and Varvatos gazed down at them from his horse. On both sides of him, Olivia and Rivelg were also on horseback, doing the same exact thing.

"Honestly, what was the enemy even thinking?" Rivelg wondered with a deep sigh. It felt bone-deep, and Varvatos could relate.

"...They must believe that they would never cut down their fellow man. A conviction. Or something like that."

There had been more injuries than could be counted in the previous battle. However, there wasn't a single fatality.

Plenty had experienced death firsthand, but nothing had eliminated their spirits, which meant they could all be revived without issue. This resulted in a strange absence of war casualties, and the soldiers' faces on the way home showed hints of no tragic heroism that you might otherwise see in returning troops.

"To me, a conviction is the force that pushes us toward a goal. But it seems like accomplishing their goal is a burden for that woman and her forces. They're only hurting themselves."

Rivelg was a realist and hated those beyond his own understanding. It was unlikely he'd ever warm up to a woman like Lydia.

On the other hand, Olivia seemed to hold a different opinion.

"Conviction, huh? ...Maybe that's why I lost twice," she whispered as she stared at the sword at her side. She then turned to Varvatos. "Hey. Should we

really keep this up?”

Varvatos said nothing. A shadow fell over his beautiful face. Olivia was about to press him further, but...

“Enough,” Rivelg interjected. “Lady Olivia. I’m aware you and His Majesty share a long history, but you are nothing more than his sword and vassal at present. You must maintain that distinction. Our duty is to obey His Majesty. Any attempt to interfere with his intentions is your own arrogance getting out of line.”

Rivelg shot her a death glare, which Olivia returned with a fiery look of her own...but she finally swallowed her words back down.

Varvatos remained silent as he watched their exchange. The hazy outline of home came into view.

“...Look, Olivia. On the other side of that wall are the people we should be protecting. We have a utopia we made ourselves.”

His voice was heavy somehow. It was like he was trying to convince himself more than anyone else.

“We’ve fulfilled our greatest desire. So...isn’t that enough?”



This world was once ruled by beings known as the Old Gods and their human followers. There were hardly any wars in those days, and this era of peace lasted for many, many years.

Everything, however, changed one day.

Invaders known as the Outer Ones came from another world, quickly rushing in and declaring war. They launched a large-scale assault. To fight against the Outer Ones’ devastatingly high proficiency for war, the Old Gods created god-smiting weapons such as the Holy Swords...but the outcome was a tragic one.

From then on, the world was ruled by the Outer Ones and their followers, and humanity was enslaved. Robbed of their dignity and basic rights, people were forced to live like cattle, given no choice but to accept the situation for what it was.

The world, however, shifted once again with the appearance of Varvatos. He spread magic especially created for humankind across the world and

raised a host of rebel armies. Under his guidance, the people slowly inched closer to regaining autonomy.

...And from such a world rose an exceptional land.

A small nation known as Megatholium. It was the size of a large city and the only territory that the Outer Ones had accepted as independently governed by mortals.

Varvatos, the king of this very special country, silently looked at documents all alone in his office.

The king's office was inorganic and sparse. Mountains of parchment were piled on the work desk set in the center. He glanced over each sheet with a strained expression.

"Hmm. The budget for the sewer construction is too low. That'll lower their morale. It's the budget for maintaining public order that's too high. Maybe we should allocate the excess to construction efforts."

These tedious matters took up a majority of the king's days. It was incredibly boring, but Varvatos didn't mind. As he looked over the documents, he thought about the lives of the citizens under his protection.

He imagined they were enjoying full lives despite the many ups and downs. There were no higher beings, no existences that were unreasonable and absurd. Megatholium was the ideal society they had fought so hard for.

...That's why Varvatos thought he'd made the right decision.

At least, that was what he wanted to think.

However, many others were of conflicting opinion. The next document he picked up was evidence enough of this.

"...A written petition from my subordinates, huh?"

The contents urged reform. Namely—a desire to rebel against the Outer Ones once again.

".....Do these idiots have a death wish? Why can't they understand where I'm coming from?"

With a bitter expression, Varvatos scrunched up the paper and tossed it in the trash can. He felt a little guilty about that.

"...I made the right decision. This is for the best. As long as I keep things the way they are, no one will leave me. I haven't done anything wrong."

This was only meant to convince himself.

“Indeed. Your Majesty’s judgment is infallible. You have not erred once.”

Varvatos gasped as he heard his aide, Rivelg, the knight of roses. He hadn’t realized anyone else was in the room. If Rivelg had been an assassin, he could have taken the king down in a single strike. Varvatos turned red with shame, mentally scolding himself for letting his guard down.

The aide smiled at him. “It seems you’ve been called to review more paperwork than usual. You must be exhausted, Your Majesty.”

“...Yeah. You’re right.”

“You’re a picture-perfect ruler, engaging in a steady stream of government affairs even when you’re tired. However, even someone as transcendent as yourself requires rest.”

“...You have a point.”

Varvatos slowly stood. He left the remaining duties to Rivelg and retired to the nap room. It was as inorganic as the office, and the space was furnished with nothing more than a simple bed.

He went to lie down, sunk his face into the soft pillow, and closed his eyes

---



Even if he wanted to forget things. Even if he tried to look away.

As long as he was himself, his past would never disappear.

A scene from Varvatos’s childhood flashed through his mind’s eye.

He’d always been alone since the day he was born. Abandoned as a child, he was picked up by the head of an orphanage and raised there. Most of the other children had very similar histories. No one accepted Varvatos, the first human mage, however. They were petrified of him, labeling the boy a demon.

Under these circumstances, the lonely boy would ask himself questions in his mind.

*Why was I born?*

*What am I living for?*

*Why do I have to live in this twisted, hopeless world?*

All of his days were spent in isolation as he fruitlessly searched for

answers.

The one who put an end to that emptiness was his big sister of sorts, Olivia.

*“I refuse to put up with this intolerable life. That’s our fuel. Don’t you feel the same way?”*

This girl was the first person to not fear him. To treat him with decency.

Varvatos told himself he would live for Olivia. He would help spark the revolution she envisioned, take back the dignity of humankind, and create a world where everyone could smile and live happily ever after. He told himself doing so would give his life meaning.

...At this point, Varvatos lacked the confidence to be a leader. He was the definition of a war machine whose sole purpose was to fulfill Olivia’s greatest wish.

One boy changed all that for Varvatos.

He was Varvatos’s second friend after Olivia, and he was the one who taught the orphan how to live not only as an instrument of war, but also as a person.

It was this boy’s death that helped him realize his full humanity.

*“Hey, Var...do you like this world...? I personally hate it...”*

During a certain incident, his friend had incited the demons’ wrath, been sentenced to the death penalty, and fallen to a merciless death. After coming to grips with this tragedy, Varvatos had an epiphany, which remained intense in his mind.

Olivia’s hopes and dreams were no longer hers alone. They had become his, too.

He would change the world.

*To avenge my friend’s death, I’ll do my best to...no, I will create change,* he vowed.

With this fire burning within him, he formed a rebel army with Olivia. His natural beauty and breathtaking presence gave him an irresistible charisma, and together with his title as humanity’s first mage, he had amassed forces in the blink of an eye.

Yes, those were the halcyon days of humanity. Regardless of age or gender, everyone revered Varvatos and flocked to him. To meet their expectations, he made great strides as both a soldier and a person, continuing to march forever forward. At the time, he believed he could carry on like this

until the very end. He thought himself invincible and concluded everything he desired would come to be.

However—

*“You’re strong. The strongest, no doubt. But even if you can destroy the enemy and protect yourself with that power, you can’t protect anyone else.”*

It was *their* fault it all came crashing down. *Their* fault the dream ended.

*“I bet you’ll keep on winning from here on out. But you’ll lose friends with every victory. In the end, you’ll be the last one standing. You’ll have no one. Be my guest; be a lonely king in your lonely country. I’ll be watching and laughing at you.”*

The prophecy came true. Varvatos wasn’t able to stop it.

His friends died. A steady stream of victories brought him ever closer to his heart’s desire, and his friends kept passing on.

His irreplaceable friends. The people he was supposed to protect.

They all fell victim to a merciless reality.

...At this rate, Varvatos would fulfill the vow he made to his departed friend, but if the end of that road was nothing more than an empty horizon...

If not a single person would be around to share it with him...

What would keeping this promise accomplish?

As Varvatos agonized over this, the entity offered an alternative.

*“Be my dog. If you do, you won’t lose anything else. Far from it, in fact. I’ll grant your every wish.”*

Varvatos understood the dark temptation he was dealing with, but...he made his decision.

To protect others. To protect himself.

Varvatos decided that he was going to—



Varvatos opened his eyes feeling nauseated, like he’d broken through the water’s surface too quickly after exploring the bottom of the sea.

“...That dream again.”

Ever since that fated day, he’d been plagued by nightmares. His first encounter with Lydia Beginsgate had awakened past traumas that haunted

him in his sleep.

*What could the reason be?*

Varvatos knew the answer but chose not to think about it.

“...Shit, my clothes are soaked in sweat. Gross.”

Wiping the perspiration dripping from his forehead, he sighed, looking irritated, and sat up.

“Hey, honey. Seeing you all sweaty really turns me on.”

An elegant voice called out to him from a corner of the room. The androgynous tone was as crisp as a clear blue sky, and anyone who didn’t know better would find it hypnotizing.

However, Varvatos knew its true nature, and it made his skin crawl.

“...What do you want, Mephisto Yuu Phegor?”

The room was lit by lamplight, yet the figure stood in a corner of darkness. Varvatos glared, twisting his beauty.

“Come on now. Don’t give me that look. What’d I ever do to you?”

With a brazen smile, the figure took one, then two steps forward.

Mephisto Yuu Phegor. He was one of the Outer Ones, if not their leader. He had the sweet visage of a young angel... Though his appearance was heavenly, he was a devil inside.

He approached Varvatos, cloaked in a dark flowing garment, his silky black hair trailing after him. Mephisto’s glimmering golden eyes narrowed.

“You’ve failed to defeat *my daughter* for the second time. She’s brilliant, isn’t she?” Mephisto asked with an alluring grin.

Varvatos instinctively clenched his fists.

Lydia Beginsgate was a half-elf born of an elven woman and Mephisto Yuu Phegor.

How could someone like her even exist? Varvatos had no way of knowing and no desire to find out. All he had to do was obey orders as this man’s dog. He just had to carry out the repulsive mission to kill Mephisto’s own daughter.

“...We’ve only tried twice. Isn’t it too soon for you to yell at me to pick up the pace?”

“Hmm? No, no, I’m not here to do that. I just wanted to see my sweet honey’s face while he’s sleeping.”

The smile on his radiant, angelic face deepened, and Mephisto reached out his hand. Just as those soft, slim fingers were about to touch Varvatos’s pale

cheek—

“Quit messing around, perv.” Varvatos smacked his hand away with unhidden fury.

“Oh dear, as cold as ever, I see. That’s why I like you so much.” The corners of Mephisto’s mouth turned upward as he looked at Varvatos like one would admire an unfriendly dog. “I’d love to hang around with you forever, but I’m actually quite busy. This was a quick rendezvous, but I’m afraid I must be going.”

“...Never come back, sicko.”

Mephisto seemed amused by these scathing words and smiled.

“Well, my honey. I expect you to be a good little pet. Otherwise—things will *really* start getting interesting.”

A terrible wickedness peeked through his grin, and he vanished out of sight.

“.....”

Varvatos stared at the empty air for some time, then finally let out a deep sigh.

“Ugh, I really do feel sick.”

He didn’t want to go back to sleep but didn’t think he could deal with more government matters, either. He wouldn’t be able to get work done if he felt this awful.

“...Guess I’ll go take my mind off things.”

Varvatos gloomily peeled himself out of bed.



Even if he couldn’t ask for a better environment to live in, Varvatos’s situation was still far from ideal.

He continued to suffer daily in his master-servant relationship with Mephisto and his repulsive affections. It was a constant weight on his heart, and the accumulated stress was substantial. Varvatos occasionally took this out on his subordinates, which made him fall into a cycle of self-loathing.

That said, he almost always managed to get his work done, and his mind remained sane. The nightmares took their toll on Varvatos, however, and the mental strain would stretch him to his limits.

When it got too bad, he headed to the castle town. Of course, this was

only after he magically transformed his appearance. Varvatos's beauty was praised as the work of the gods, and the weak-hearted fainted at the very sight of him. Many had fallen victim the last time he strolled into town with only minor modifications. The whole place practically broke out into a mass panic.

This time, he transformed himself into a different person entirely. He was now a completely average-looking young man with no unique features to speak of.

With his newfound sense of freedom, Varvatos set out to enjoy the town nightlife. The magic stone devices intermittently placed along the paved street illuminated the downtown district, and the people were as loud at night as they were during the day.

"You there, young man! How about taking a break at our place?"

"Huh? I heard your joint's a total rip-off. You aren't fooling me." A man snubbed someone beckoning him into his shop.

"Aha-ha-ha-ha-ha! The world's spinning!"

"Y-you've had way too much to drink! Get it together, boss!"

A young man was looking after a drunk woman.

The night brought out people's true natures. That was why Varvatos was so fascinated by it. After all, it was impossible to find this view elsewhere—people revealing their genuine selves, living freely, laughing and smiling openly.

Such pleasures often taken for granted were precious in this era. In the lands controlled by the Outer Ones and the demons, everyone was frightened of encountering a higher being and spent their lives cowering in fear. If they acted of their own volition and invoked the displeasure of the powers...a cruel death awaited them.

On the other hand, much like this city of Megatholium, cities controlled by the rebels were governed by humanity. That said, one couldn't necessarily call their situation a good one. The townspeople lived in constant fear of attack by the higher beings...and the local rebel soldiers stirred up their own brand of chaos.

That was why this city was so unique. Only Megatholium served as a utopia for humanity. It was a society where everyone could smile and look forward to the next day. There was none other like it.

"...I knew I wasn't wrong."

The energy and smiles of these people were proof of this. Being

Mephisto's dog disgusted Varvatos, but he'd gotten a lot out of it. The citizens had a place of rest where they could live in peace. He wouldn't lose anyone else. This assured Varvatos that he had made the right choice.

"...I guess I should head back."

His heart had stabilized to a degree. He would return to the castle and finish the rest of his governmental affairs. Just as he thought this...

"Get back here, you hag!" a man threatened, voice echoing from a back alley nearby.

"Okay! I'm coming!"

He heard a familiar voice.

*No, wait. That's impossible. She can't be here.*

As soon as this crossed his mind, a woman carrying a younger girl jumped out from the alleyway. Her beautiful silver hair fluttered down her waist, and she stopped right in the middle of the street.

"You watch from that wall over there, okay?"

"O-okay."

The woman put the girl down, gave a warlike smile, and turned around to face the back alley. Soon enough, a group of men who looked like bad news appeared in droves to surround her.

"Finally ready to give in, you witch...?!"

"Time to pay for messing with our business."

"You really think we'd back off because we're in public? Please."

"You aren't getting away...!"

The town delinquents glowered. Any normal person would burst into tears and beg for their life in this situation, but this woman was different. She thrust her chest out proudly as she spoke.

"Hah! You twerps got it all wrong. I'm not running. I was looking for a spot. One perfect for a fight!" The woman revealed a vicious smile that was more like a snarl. "A fight is better with a nice, big audience! And now we've got all the eyes we could ask for!" she said before shouting "I'm ready! Come at me, guys!!"

The delinquents wouldn't just let her provoke them.

""""Bring it on, wench!""""

Bellowing angrily, each whipped out an array of dangerous weapons from their pockets. The most powerful ones on the market in this era were equipped with magic, but even if they were the most violent people in the

world, these guys weren't dumb enough to shoot off spells in the middle of town. So they'd equipped themselves with knives and fisticuffs as they approached her.

The woman greeted the brutes cheerfully—

“Aaargh!” She pummeled them mercilessly. It was a spectacular example of an underdog beating the odds. Observers were nervous initially, but her skills soon won them over. The crowd started to clap and cheer.

Mixed in the crowd was Varvatos, who stared at the proceedings with his jaw slack.

“...What *is* she?”

There was no mistaking the beautiful woman who took down rogues like she was having the time of her life.

It was Lydia Beginsgate.

“...That's not some body double, right? Her magic is almost an exact match.”

All methods of verification led to the same answer. That elf woman was Lydia. There was no doubt.

This was precisely why Varvatos felt like he was going crazy.

“Why...? Why is she here...?”

He couldn't wrap his head around it. Even Lydia had to have known that Megatholium was enemy territory. Their main commander couldn't have possibly sneaked in by herself, right?

Now that she was right in front of him, he had no choice but to accept that she could have done it. The main priority at the moment was to figure out what Lydia was up to.

If Varvatos was in enemy territory, he would cause chaos in town to try to destroy them from the inside out, but...

“Nice! Go get 'em, Miss!”

“Amazing! Can people move that fast?!”

...Well, it was true she was causing a scene. But there was something bothering him.

She wasn't anything like he'd expected. Lydia's only concern was putting on a good show for the crowd. She didn't seem the least bit intent on starting a massacre.

“...Seriously, what *is* she?”

Just as Varvatos felt more confused than ever...

One of the delinquents in front of Lydia dashed elsewhere. He was aiming for the child watching them by the wall. A glint in his eye, he approached the girl Lydia had been carrying; the man must have been planning to take her hostage.

Lydia was so busy dealing with the swarm in front of her that she didn't notice what he was planning.

*At this rate, that defenseless girl will be in danger.* Varvatos began to move.

"If you're a man—"

The words poured out of him as he raced toward her.

"—then fight with honor."

Varvatos unleashed an open-palm strike and hit the man square in the jaw. His opponent fell to the ground, but Varvatos felt no sense of satisfaction. If anything, he regretted getting involved.

He had snapped with the best of intentions. For as long as he could remember, a part of his nature couldn't ignore a person in distress.

"Who the hell are you?!"

"Y-you think you can get away with hitting our big bro?!"

...That was why things turned out this way. The delinquents now turned their attention not only to Lydia, but to him as well. Escape...would be difficult. They had surrounded him in an instant.

"Ugh, damn. I don't even care anymore...!"

Clicking his tongue, Varvatos stepped toward the group and joined the fray with Lydia. He enchanted the spectators just as much as she did...or maybe more.

"He's really doing a number on them, huh?!"

"His moves are so fluid...!"

"It's like he's dancing...!"

Upon witnessing Varvatos's elegant techniques adapted from martial arts, everyone sighed with admiration. Lydia puffed out her cheeks at the attention he was getting.

"Hey, you! Quit stealing the show!" she snapped as she threw a guy.

"I wasn't trying to...! More importantly..." Varvatos began after finishing off the flying man by kneeing him in the solar plexus. He then picked up a stone off the ground and threw it in Lydia's direction.

Its sharp edge grazed her cheek—and it struck the man about to stab her

from behind square in the forehead.

“Your back was exposed, rookie.”

“Who are you calling a rookie?!”

“I don’t see anyone else around. Besides, your moves have been a mess from the beginning. It’s hard to watch.”

“Shut your trap and get off that high horse! You make me wanna hurl! Stupid! Idiot! Moron!”

“*Sigh.* You should take a look in the mirror once this fight is over. I believe you’ll find a humanoid face lacking in both intelligence and vocabulary.”

As they sparred in this verbal war, they cooperated like they were siblings. Each had the other’s back, and the two beat down one ruffian after the other.

Then the last one finally hit the ground. The enemy hadn’t landed a single blow.

“*Phew.* Not a bad fight.”

Lydia had on an invigorating smile that said *I worked up a good sweat.* She then rushed over to the girl who had been watching them by the wall.

“It’s all over now, Miss. There’s nothing to fear anymore.”

Her pompous tone was completely different from the one moments earlier. Her chivalrous demeanor, paired with her ethereal beauty, really was quite captivating. From Varvatos’s perspective, repulsiveness was her only outstanding quality.

The girl, on the other hand, blushed red and expressed her gratitude.

“Th-thank you very much. If you hadn’t been here, I would have...”

“No need to thank me. I just did what anybody else would do,” Lydia replied, flashing a pearly smile. She then wrapped her arms around the girl’s shoulders. “Even a safe town like this one has kidnappers. It’s impossible to enjoy the nightlife in peace... But you’ll be safe as long as you’re by my side.”

As she wrapped up this little speech, Lydia looked at the girl straight on with a glint in her eye. “What do you say, Miss? Shall we paint the town red?”

“...Huh?”

Everyone else present, the girl included, must have thought the following: *What is she talking about?*

Varvatos was on the same page. *No, seriously, what's she going on about?*

The audience who had viewed her as a hero only moments before suddenly were staring at her like a sad piece of trash. They walked away disenchanted.

Lydia was apathetic to the crowd's reaction, and she descended upon the girl.

"With a lovely catch like you, Miss, I'm sure we'll have the greatest night of our lives. There's a nice little inn nearby. Let's pop in, and—"

"A-ah, well, I'm not really into..."

"What? You've been missing out. Let's explore new worlds. I'm sure you'll have a great time. To the inn! Don't worry, the tab's on me. C'mon, let's get going. The inn awaits!"

How could one describe her?

She was like a gross old man creeping on a young girl. A beauty with a garbage center.

Unsurprisingly, the girl didn't appreciate her advances.

"P-please stop! You're a perv!"

Lydia had tried to touch her butt, and the girl pushed back, full force, before running away in fear.

"Huh?! W-wait, Miss! Hey! Hold on! Wait, you little brat! I saved you! At least let me have one round!"

*She's the scum of humankind*, Varvatos thought from the very bottom of his heart.

The living trash continued to kick the ground in frustration for some time. Then, she looked at him and stared.

"Hey. What's your name?"

There was absolutely no way he'd ever give his real name. Varvatos used a fake one he'd been using for this identity he created.

"Daniel. Daniel Wilaski."

"I'm Lydia Beginsgate. So, Daniel. How 'bout a drink?"

"...What?"

*A drink? Her and me?*

He couldn't possibly—

"It'll be great! C'mon! Let's go!"

Lydia grabbed his arm and started yanking him along. It should have been

easy to shake her off, but for whatever reason, Varvatos didn't. Even he didn't know why.

*What will sharing a drink together accomplish? There's no point. After all, this woman and I are enemies.*

...Even as he thought that, he failed to turn her down and ended up in a bar on the outskirts of town.

"The girls in this town don't know a good thing when they see it!"

"Huh."

"I was shot down twenty times today! *Twenty!* Can you believe it?!"

"Huh."

"Guess I got no choice! Starting tomorrow, I'm going for some hot guys!"

"Huh."

"Speaking of hot guys, the king of Megatholium is totally my type."

"...Um."

"Those looks could kill. Like, I wanna screw him real bad."

"....."

"He's pretty and all, but on the inside, he's kinda..."

"...A pervert like you shouldn't comment on character."

"Huh? You say somethin'?"

"Nothing."

Listening to the ramblings of a drunk enemy commander felt surreal. Why was he even here? He had no idea.

"*Aaaah!* Okay, Daniel! Drinking challenge! If you can drink more than me, the tab's on me! If I win, it's on you!"

"...Why would I do something like that?"

He normally wasn't one to change his mind once it was made up, but...

"Hmm. Afraid you'll lose, huh?" Lydia asked.

"...Excuse me?"

"I can't believe a guy like you doesn't have the guts to take on a woman in a drinking contest."

"...Fine, but don't complain if you die from alcohol poisoning."

*I never take the bait this easily.* For some reason, his competitive spirit burned...

"What's wrong, perv? Had enough?"

"Heh, heh-heh. Notta shance. Imma just gettin' started."

"You'll hurt yourself if you push yourself. Why not just accept an

honorable defeat?”

“A-ain’t your faysh red, too? Anyways, yer swayin’ all over the place. Fink maybe ya had enough?”

“If I appear to be swaying, that just proves your own drunkenness. I’m perfectly fine. I could finish off two more casks.”

“Heh-hehhh. Not bad. But ah can shtill drink three.”

“Okay. By the way, it appears I’ve made a slight miscalculation. Accounting for my empty stomach and bladder, I can finish off at least four more casks.”

“Oh yeaah? Well, I made ah mishtake, too. I can shtill do five. Yep, no problem.”

“Really? Well, I’ve just remembered I have a fatal disease where I’ll die unless I drink six casks. So six would be better.”

“Oh yeah, I got dis disease where mah boobies will explode if I don’t down seven.”

Varvatos was well aware how ridiculous they sounded.

*Why am I being so stupid?* he thought. And yet, he didn’t stop.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Look, Daniel! A pink dragon is flyin’ around over ’der!”

“Pull it together, idiot. There’s no such thing as pink dragons. That’s a giant kitty. Ohhh, look at those little toe beans. I wanna get buried in ’em and suffocate...”

That night, Varvatos got drunk for the first time ever, and with the enemy he was supposed to kill—



How long had it been since he’d blacked out from drinking? Varvatos opened his eyes to a dull headache.

“Where am I...?”

An unfamiliar field of flowers was spread out before him. Why was he here? What did he do? He had no idea.

“...I guess she’s gone.”

Lydia wasn’t next to him. Did she run off elsewhere, or did her rebel army comrades come pick her up?

At any rate—his behavior had been foolish.

“Spending all night out here... What am I doing...?”

Rivelg and his other subordinates were no doubt panicking over his absence at that very same moment. What excuse could he possibly come up with?

He had a terrible hangover, and his head was killing him. But strangely enough...he didn't regret any of it. In fact...

“...Pull it together. What are you even thinking?”

Suppressing the feelings rising up within him, Varvatos stood. He soon returned to the routine he'd always followed prior to the day before. Returned to committing to protect this utopia he created. Carried out his duties as king and engaged the rebel army whenever they came calling.

...That woman was always on the battlefield.

*“I'm going to take the win today, Powderpuff!”*

She didn't win even once. Although they always put up a good fight, Lydia and her army always suffered defeat and escaped. Over and over again.

At nighttime, Varvatos came across Lydia whenever he journeyed into town to unwind. Sometimes he'd stare at her in exasperation when she got into yet another fight or sigh when she took out her rage on a wall after a failed pickup line or feel disgusted when she got hammered and threw up everywhere.

This time, one of many already, was no different. Still plagued by nightmares, Varvatos left the castle that night, headed downtown as Daniel Wilaski...and met up with her.

It wasn't planned, of course. Some sort of magnetism always seemed to bring them together.

“Hey, Daniel. Let's go get a drink.”

“...Okay.”

This was their routine.

*I know I'm being stupid, but it's so strange... I feel good for some reason. Maybe it's Lydia's personality... I like hanging around her.*

“Hey, check out that sexy lady. You ever see such a huge rack?”

“...Bigger isn't necessarily better.”

“Heh. Guess you're not a boob man, Daniel.”

“I never said that.”

He'd never had a dirty conversation before. Being with her made him act dumb.

And it felt good. In recent days, Varvatos looked forward to this time spent forgetting his role and living like a normal person.

...But that was also what made this so painful. The two were destined to kill each other, even if he tried to defy fate. There was no question he would succeed someday... His friends would die otherwise. And he didn't want that. Ever.

And yet...he couldn't kill Lydia as commanded.

"Aaaargh... I mighta hadda li'l too much to drink again..."

Lydia staggered in front of him down a street in the dark city. Her back was exposed. If Varvatos had wanted to, he could have taken her life right then and there.

...When he considered his position, he knew it was what he *should* do. Yet he couldn't make a single move to carry it out.

They finally arrived at the inn Lydia was staying at.

"Later, Daniel. Let's go drinkin' again."

"...Yeah."

They exchanged their usual good-byes and parted. Varvatos walked through the night alone.

"What am I even doing...?"

He was hanging his head in self-condemnation when...

"Yeah. What *are* you doing?" asked a familiar voice, and Varvatos's surroundings shifted. The illuminated cityscape disintegrated, leaving only a heavy darkness behind. This was the work of *his* space magic.

Yes... Mephisto Yuu Phegor had created a world solely for them.

"Hey there, honey. I'm delighted to see you in a fine mood. But you could say I'm feeling a bit sour. I don't need to tell you the reason, do I?" he asked with a tilt of his head and a dazzling smile. This was more effective than any threat.

"...Unlike those of us with a finite life span, you can live into eternity. Don't you think pestering me this much makes you look impatient?"

"I'm quite even-tempered. If I wasn't, you would have lost everything by now."

The radiant smile on his youthful features slowly transformed into something far more sinister. Mephisto stared at Varvatos with an all-seeing gaze as he spoke.

"You'll never kill my daughter without outside help. I'm here because

you've made that perfectly clear to me, honey."

Varvatos began to object, but...

"No, it's useless. You can't kill my daughter. After all, she's grown on you. It's not romantic, though. You envy and admire her. That's why you'll never make the logical decision, even if I give you all the time in the world."

*Envy and admire.* That summed up Varvatos's feelings succinctly.

"You realized her true nature the moment you two first met. You're both the same at heart. The truth is: You're reflections of each other. It makes sense. After all, *I made her that way*. However, just like how a mirror image of yourself is inverted, her way of life is the polar opposite of yours."

Mephisto continued to talk as he walked around Varvatos.

"Unlike you who have yielded to my threats, she never stops moving. She never compromises and always sticks to her beliefs. You envy and admire people like her. You've never felt this way before. That's why she's special to you. And it's those emotions that are stopping you from crossing a certain line."

Mephisto stood in front of Varvatos and shrugged.

"Seeing you in pain was my greatest joy. That was because I never knew what you were going to do next. Now that you're an open book, there's nothing for me to savor. Therefore—"

Mephisto's next words were delivered with a cruel smile, and he said the last thing Varvatos ever wanted to hear.

"This is my final warning. If you fail to kill my daughter in the next battle... Hmm. I know! I'll kill Olivia vel Vine instead."

"———!!"

As soon as Varvatos heard this, all the blood rushed to his head. Before he knew it, he had grabbed Mephisto by the collar. He glared at his longtime enemy with loathing and bloodlust.

Mephisto cackled like a child.

"Be my guest. A little murder doesn't bother me. If it'll help you feel better, then by all means. Death at the hands of my beloved will bring me supreme pleasure."

*Go ahead.*

That was the message in Mephisto's eyes, and Varvatos clicked his tongue. There was no point in killing him here. After all, this was just one detached part of him.

It was pointless. Resistance was futile. Didn't he become this man's dog because he realized anything else would only result in more loss?

"Come on; it's so simple. You just have to send a single soldier off to the other world. Nothing more. Do that, and your big sister can live. You won't lose a thing."

Were these the unholy whispers of a devil?

Mephisto gave a sinful smile. "Later, honey. I trust you'll make the right decision."

After planting a kiss on Varvatos's forehead, he disappeared. Their surroundings instantaneously returned to normal.

"...What...?"

Alone in the city, Varvatos look up at the sky, and like the darkness all around him, his heart was somber.

"...What should I do?"



A few days had passed since Mephisto's final warning, and Varvatos enjoyed a rather peaceful period. There were no major incidents, and the rebel army remained quiet.

He knew *that* moment was inevitably approaching. He would have to fight the renegade forces again. And he would have to confront Lydia. What was he supposed to do then? The more Varvatos considered the future, the more trapped he felt.

"...Olivia, do you have some free time tonight?" he asked as he oversaw more government affairs.

Something must have set off her big-sister senses, because she immediately detected the pain haunting him.

"Yeah. You can come to my room any time later tonight. I'll make some tea."

A few hours later...

As the sky began to darken, Varvatos got up from his work and headed to Olivia's room. As promised, she had set up black tea for two on the table and was waiting for him.

"Sorry to bother you. I know you're busy, too."

“Don’t worry about it... Come on, sit down.”

Accepting her invitation, Varvatos sat down and took a sip of tea.

“...How long have we known each other? Two hundred, three hundred years? Time certainly does fly.”

He always beat around the bush whenever something needed to be said. However, Olivia forgave this bad habit and continued to observe him quietly.

“Time changes people, doesn’t it, Olivia? When I first met you, I was nothing more than a puppet. And I was fine with that. After all, I considered myself a war machine whose sole purpose was to fulfill your wish. But...”

It was here Varvatos took another sip of tea with slightly trembling fingers.

“Everything I’ve gained has sparked a change in me,” he said. “I couldn’t help it... Sometimes I think life would have been much easier if I had only stayed the way I was. If only I’d remained a tool meant to carry out your dreams.”

*Then I wouldn’t have felt so miserable.*

...He knew that was misplaced frustration, so he purposefully omitted it.

However, his big sister wasn’t oblivious. Perfectly aware that he was lashing out at her unreasonably, Olivia simply looked at Varvatos with an air of calm. She sighed.

“You’ve grown incredibly as a person and a king. I’ve been rooting for you from the sidelines. But...it’s also worried me that such progress has actually been hurting you... Bad premonitions are annoyingly accurate, huh?”

Olivia looked somewhat heartbroken as she faced her little brother.

“We used to hold hands and walk forward side by side. But now...it’s different. I’m amazed by your progress... I can’t keep up anymore. I don’t have the skill to meet you at your level. I know you see me as a big sister, but I have no choice but to serve as your vassal.”

Her face, beautiful and sorrowful, showed hints of self-condemnation. She understood her little brother was hurting, but there was nothing she could do to comfort him. After all, she no longer walked by his side.

“Var. Forgive your worthless big sister. No matter how much you’re hurting, all I can say is this—I’ll believe in you and follow you. No matter what lies on the road ahead, I won’t regret it... In the end, I’m forced to put everything on you. It kills me inside.”

Varvatos's lips trembled as Olivia bowed her head. He had come to her hoping she could point him in the right direction, but this was all she could do. His big sister wouldn't offer any answers. She was pushing him away and telling him to figure things out on his own.

As this reality weighed on him, Olivia suddenly murmured, "If only there was someone who could understand your pain and stand by your side..."

The moment she said this, it hit him. *Her* image crossed Varvatos's mind. That rude, crass, unfeminine headache.

...The moment the face of this affable bad influence came to mind...he was flooded with a desire to see her.

"...I'm going out. Watch the place for me."

Varvatos stood from his seat and quickly left the castle, transforming into Daniel Wilaski and strolling into the nightlife.

Right on cue...

"Hey, Daniel."

They met again as if drawn toward each other. They had managed to see each other again.

As soon as their eyes met, Varvatos gave Lydia a soft smile. Even he wasn't sure why.

"Not feeling it tonight, huh? You don't look like you're in a drinkin' mood."

"...Yeah. I'd like you to come somewhere with me... Are you busy?"

"Nope. I'll go anywhere. So stop looking like you're about to cry, okay?"

*About to cry?* Was that the face he was making? Embarrassed, Varvatos hurried them along in an attempt to hide it.

They arrived at their destination—a low hill outside of town with an observation deck set on top.

"Hey, this is a pretty sweet view. You can see the city and the stars at the same time. It's the perfect spot for charming a lady... But you didn't bring me all the way here for that, huh?"

"No."

Even he had no idea what he was doing. Everything was on pure impulse. That was why Varvatos didn't give much thought to his next words. He just said whatever came to mind.

"Lydia, what do you think of Megatholium?"

"Hmm, good question." Putting both hands on the railing, she stared out at

the city shining in the darkness and smiled. “First off, the girls here are on another level. The prostitutes treat you right, too. Plus, the food’s awesome. I’m especially a fan of the seafood. That said, this place can’t hold a candle to my hometown.”

“...How do I put this? Someone only cares about instant gratification.”

“Hee-hee. Isn’t that only human? ...But all of those things are a bonus.”

“A bonus?”

“Yeah. I can satisfy my desires, eat till I’m stuffed, and sleep in a soft bed, but it’s not like other towns don’t have those things, too. There’s something only this place has. And that’s—”

Unlike moments before, Lydia’s smile was now honest and pure. Varvatos had never seen someone who looked so innocent. She continued.

“Dignity for humankind. Here, people can live as people. And that’s what I love most.”

“...You think so, too?”

Lydia nodded once, slowly. “Yeah, this city is a utopia. It’s perfect... Though from what I can tell, it’s got plenty of crooked types.”

She looked at Varvatos earnestly.

“And it’s all thanks to you, *Powderpuff*.”

Varvatos’s eyes opened wide at the nickname. “...You knew?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“...Why did you pretend not to know me?”

“I was curious. I wanted to know who you are. Always have,” Lydia said as she looked up at the stars. “I’ve been terrified of my dad—Mephisto—since I was a little kid. I wanted to fight him, but I got too scared...and couldn’t do anything. You’re the one who gave me courage.”

“.....”

“As soon as I heard someone out there was fighting him and waving a flag of rebellion for humanity, my heart screamed *That’s amazing!* I felt an intense urge to be and live like that. And before I knew it...I was commanding a rebel army. You granted me courage. That’s why I was able to step forward, and it’s why I can still keep going. I was able to take this path because you walked it first.”

But such reasoning was also why Lydia now looked at Varvatos with disappointment, eyes narrowing.

“I used to admire you. I’ve wanted answers to a lot of questions, like why you ended up his dog and what you’re even thinking... And it’s also why I gave you my earlier answer. Your mortal weakness is the source of the deceit overrunning this town.”

Varvatos said nothing. He couldn’t. He could only stare back at her and listen.

“This town is the best. It’s a utopia where people can be themselves. But that *only* happens here. No matter who’s calling the shots, everyone elsewhere lives an unpleasant reality... I wouldn’t care if you were the type who could tolerate a world like that. I’d understand you gotta protect your own little slice of heaven. It’d be the right thing to do, but...”

Lydia grimaced as she clenched her fists. Her expression shifted from disappointment to anger as she put her feelings into words.

“You’re lost, aren’t you? You don’t know what to do. Beneath that calm exterior, you’re always on the verge of tears and about to shout *I don’t want to do this. But I’m scared to lose everything, so I have no choice!* ...That weakness of yours is woven all throughout town.”

Lydia stared directly into Varvatos’s eyes.

“Words alone won’t cut it from here on out. We’re both soldiers, aren’t we? We have emotions that can only be expressed in battle. That’s why—”

As if understanding the entire scope of Varvatos’s situation, Lydia made a declaration of war.

“Let this next fight be our last.”

She then left without ever giving Varvatos the solution he sought. Lydia had pushed him away to fend for himself. Her basic message was *Fight me and find your own answer.*

“...Yeah, you’re right. We’ll finish this next time,” he murmured alone in the darkness.

For the first time in his life, Varvatos felt no fear of battle. Then—

The day finally came.

Upon receiving word that a rebel army led by Lydia was approaching a

certain city, Varvatos gathered his forces and set out. After a bit of travel, they confronted the enemy in the middle of a vast open field. Normally, Varvatos would map out their strategic formations from the rear and focus on issuing commands from there. At least, that had been the pattern thus far.

However...this fight was not like the others. Taking a path carved out by his soldiers, Varvatos made his way toward the front lines and the enemy.

His forces watched, visibly nervous.

*This battle will be a major turning point.*

The premonition was written across their grave expressions.

Then...Varvatos and Lydia faced their armies behind them.

Unsurprisingly, Lydia's eyes didn't show a shadow of a doubt. His, on the other hand, were hesitant. Nevertheless, it was too late to turn back now.

Varvatos took a deep breath. "Everyone! Listen to me! From here on, this will be a battle between the two commanders! If I suffer defeat, our forces will unite with the enemy! We shall obey their will!"

Both armies stirred at Varvatos's declaration. Lydia followed with a statement of her own.

"Listen up, you weasels! If I lose, we'll go quietly! We ain't spillin' more blood than we have to!"

This battle was between the two of them, and neither wanted their subordinates getting involved. Both agreed their final confrontation would be a duel. Of course, leaders on both sides were less than thrilled. More than a few average soldiers were bound to be unhappy as well.

However, no one voiced a single complaint.

"Looks like we've both got some pretty loyal followers."

"...Yeah."

That was why he didn't want to lose them. He didn't want anyone else to die. For Varvatos, defeat was not an option.

Lydia, on the other hand, didn't show the slightest hint of zeal.

"Well, guess we should get started," she said coolly. She raised her right hand to the blue sky.

A sound like thunder soon rang out, and the space around her swayed wildly. Seconds later, the silvery white blade Vald-Galgulus was in her right hand, and she chanted a spell she'd never exhibited before.

*"Arstella. Glisten, O Soul! Fotoblis. Become my Light... Tenneblicke. And Dispel the Darkness!"*

A blue pattern carved into the Holy Sword flickered—and Lydia was suddenly outfitted from head to toe in white-silver armor.

Confronted with a power completely foreign to him, Varvatos urgently summoned his own weapon, the magical black sword Wyrn Tepes.

They both gripped their hilts, readied themselves, and looked each other in the eyes.

““HAH!””

They rushed forward at the same time. Their strength gouged holes in the ground, and enormous clumps of dirt cut through the air. The two had already locked swords before gravity could send any masses falling back to earth.

The rumbling carried on, and the resulting shock waves blasted toward both armies. No average soldier could keep their balance against such unbelievable power. Moreover, they couldn't even tell how their own commanders were faring. On top of the shock waves, wind pressure, and thunderous noise forcing their eyes shut, both combatants were moving faster than the eye could follow. It was a battle beyond mortal understanding.

Only the higher-ups caught everything. Unlike the average soldiers, their feet remained firmly planted on the ground, and each side closely observed the duel without missing a single beat.

In the midst of battle, Rivelg and Olivia murmured to each other with furrowed brows.

“...His Majesty is hesitating, isn't he?”

“Yeah. His sword is dull.”

The leaders of Lydia's army took notice of this, and they rooted for their commander.

Not a single voice, however, reached the pair. Varvatos saw only Lydia, and Lydia saw only Varvatos. Every time the black and white swords sliced the air, collided, and created more thunder and shock waves, Lydia's fervor intensified, while Varvatos could feel his own sword growing duller.

Be that as it may, an advantage in strength and experience is not easily overcome. He was already several hundred years old. Even if his movements were sluggish, a swordfighter like Varvatos with countless hours of study under his belt still had the advantage. He instinctively answered his opponent's every move with absolute accuracy.

Whether it was thanks to Lydia's unforeseen power—or an effect of her silver armor—her physical capabilities had become phenomenal. Not only

that, but her sword was also far more powerful than ever before.

However, this did not change the fact that her techniques were amateur, and Varvatos's swordplay deflected her simple, straightforward swings with ease—

Lydia's balance was thrown off, and he swept her legs out from under her.  
“Gah!”

Unable to avoid the attack or brace herself, Lydia fell to the ground. She was completely defenseless.

Varvatos held his magic sword above her, and—

*What should I do...?!*

Doubt ran through his mind and obstructed his movements. If he swung down on her, everything would be over. Lydia would die, and he would fulfill his mission without losing anything or anyone else.

...Was that the right answer? His true desire? The path he should take?

...He remembered what Rivelg had said earlier. That Varvatos had let Lydia go. That he had purposefully looked the other way.

Those suspicions were correct.

If he'd really been serious, Varvatos could have killed Lydia during their first fight. But he didn't. After all, Lydia was an ideal version of himself. He couldn't crush someone like her, and those feelings were wreaking havoc on his heart, even now.

...If not for this, everything would have been settled already. However, his reluctance held him back. In the end, no final blade came down.

“I knew it— You've got no guts!!”

With an explosion of red-hot feelings, Lydia executed a sharp front kick. It was a singular attack he could normally avoid with ease. However, perhaps due to his state of mind, Varvatos's entire body felt as heavy as lead.

And so he took a direct hit. A barrage of kicks sunk into Varvatos's abdomen, and he gave a cry of agony as he was forced back. Both feet scraped along the ground, and when he finally came to a stop, Varvatos coughed and splattered blood everywhere.

However, Lydia was relentless. Charging at him ferociously, she swung her sword without hesitation. Varvatos caught this at the last second, and as

fresh blood gushed from his mouth, he thought to himself. *Her sword is so heavy...*

This also crossed his mind back during their first confrontation. Her blade was dense, while his own was light. And for some unknown reason, he knew why.

It was conviction. Conviction determined the strength of their blades.

Lydia's confident, unshakable sword overwhelmed opponents through sheer willpower, while Varvatos's was shallow elegance that held no passion to speak of. If anything...what he expressed with his sword was nothing more than feeble complaints.

"Your power is all physical! You've got no damn heart!"

Lydia's onslaught was fierce. Varvatos, on the other hand, fought a defensive battle. In the end, the two locked swords as they pushed against each other. Both braced themselves, put every ounce of strength into their arms, and stared each other down.

Varvatos's mind raced. He looked into Lydia's eyes and formulated another thought.

*Why is she so certain...?!*

Before he knew it, he was putting these emotions into words.

"Aren't you scared?! Aren't you terrified of losing everything precious to you?!"

Lydia answered him with a cloudless gaze. "Sure, I'm scared. Why wouldn't I be? I don't want any of my friends to die."

"Then how...?! How can you keep walking ahead...?! How can you never stop moving...?!"

His sword reflected his heart. Slowly but surely, Varvatos's black blade began to yield to Lydia's, and the odds shifted in her favor.

She continued to reply effortlessly. "How many have died? How many have we killed? ...It's anyone's guess at this point. All those victims are the reason *we're both* still standing. You must know that we can't stop for a second. We don't...have the right to do that!"

A staggering amount of strength poured into the silver holy blade. Unable to withstand the blow, Varvatos was thrown backward. His slender body flew through the air, and Lydia went into pursuit—

Another sword fight ensued. As they exchanged deadly blows, Lydia shouted at him.

“All of my friends who died gave their lives for me! It’s like *I* killed them! I took their futures just as selfishly as I did the enemy! You feel the same way, right?! Both me and you are hopeless monsters! Until our bodies burn in eternal hellfire, we don’t have the right to stop!”

Varvatos was once again on the defensive, and his spirit was slowly withering. As if to reflect this...a crack ran through his blade.

“If we sit around and do nothing! If we toss away our desires, our lost friends will never rest in peace! Their lives will have been for nothing! You thought so, too! That’s what kept you going!”

He could make no argument. She was absolutely right.

For those who died. For the lives he’d taken. To make sure their sacrifice wasn’t all for nothing, *they* had to keep moving forward. This had been the constant driving force behind Varvatos’s actions. Without it, his spirit would have broken with the loss of his second friend.

If Varvatos was so fearful of losing those precious to him, shouldn’t he have forsaken this path after his friends died?

Back then, he had steeled himself. No matter how much he gained, he knew he’d lose it all again one day; but to actualize the wishes of the deceased and prove their sacrifice wasn’t in vain, he vowed to continue forward.

—That vow was not Varvatos’s alone. He had Olivia next to him, who felt the same way. They had walked side by side, and this kept him going. He had someone with him. Someone there to hold his hand. This allowed him to take the thornier path.

But now...he had no one. Olivia had let go of his hand and become one of the many followers who trailed him from behind. Before he knew it, he was being forced to walk a lonely road...

This had made him weak. His fear of loss was rooted in loneliness and the empty space beside him.

Lydia must have perceived all this. She shouted as she clashed viciously with Varvatos’s sword.

“You’re spineless! You can’t do anything on your own! You sit around and cower in the darkness!”

Mirroring Varvatos’s heart, the crack in his magic sword widened. Still taking the brunt of his opponent’s blows, he was forced to step back.

“You’re pathetic! I was stupid for ever respecting you! Even so—”

At that moment, Lydia's rage disappeared as if it had never existed. She let out a murmured sigh.

"I guess we're just buds now."

Varvatos's eyes widened. It was what he always wanted. It was the strength that fueled him.

"If you can't do anything by yourself and are too scared to walk alone, I'll stay by your side. Till the day I die."

Then—Lydia's Holy Sword broke Varvatos's weapon into a million pieces. The dark blade faded to dust, and as he watched the particles dance through the air, Varvatos lost all strength. The hilt fell from his hand and dropped to the ground. He looked up at the sky and sighed.

"...I've always been like this. I can never find my own answers."

Just like his younger self who questioned his purpose in life, Varvatos had once again failed to make any of his own decisions. He stayed forever lost and frozen until a trustworthy source showed him the way.

"I'm weak. Hopelessly so."

The words were self-deprecating, but they weren't woeful. In fact, the tone was so gentle that one might have thought he'd been possessed. Varvatos looked at Lydia, and just as he was about to reach for the answer that he'd wanted to hear—

"I knew it would end this way."

*His* voice echoed. Varvatos's greatest foe and eternal adversary, Mephisto.

An instant later, Lydia's body went flying sideways right before Varvatos's eyes as if she'd been struck by some invisible force. She crashed back into the earth, and there looking down on her...was Mephisto with a beaming smile on his youthful, radiant face.

"Hey there, daughter of mine. You're looking as lovely as ever, just like my honey. You really are the apple of my eye."

The smile on his innocent face was gentle; there wasn't even the slightest hint of malice. He adored his daughter. And it was thanks to this realization

—that everyone knew he was an absolute monster.

“You’re the same as ever...! You pervert...!”

Mephisto had only unleashed a single attack, yet Lydia was already cut up from head to toe. Even so, she glared at him savagely, and his smile deepened.

“‘Pervert’ stings coming from you. We’re father and daughter. Two peas in a pod. That’s why I love you so much,” Mephisto replied with a kind look. Nonsense continued to flow from his lips. “Before you, I thought my heart couldn’t hold a shred of love for my own child. But I was talking about it with a friend one day, and he said maybe there really is a doting side to me. I figured I’d give it a try and planted my seed in a suitable woman. Soon enough, you were born...but my, I was blown away. To think I’d love my own child this much. It’s more than I ever imagined. Not only that, I fell in love with the woman who gave birth to you. I’d say that was also a first. I’d never loved someone of the opposite sex so deeply before. And yet—I wanted to brutally kill her more than anyone else.”

Mephisto seemed to stare off in spellbound reminiscence, and his whole body trembled.

Lydia shivered as well, and she scowled at him with pure loathing.

“I’ll kill you...! I swear it...! Your life is mine...!”

Mephisto smiled flippantly even though she looked ready to pounce at any second.

“I’m afraid that’s quite impossible. After all, you’re fated to die by my hand.”

Mephisto raised his left hand in front of him. Lydia’s neck instantly constricted as her body rose in the air. Everyone watched with bated breath as the invisible hand held her captive. They were all fully aware the worst would come to pass if they stood by and did nothing. However, no one could lift a finger. The aura Mephisto now radiated as a supreme being petrified the weak and the strong.

The angel-faced demon gazed at Lydia lovingly.

“How would I feel if my beloved honey killed my dear child? That was all I wanted to know, but I suppose this is the way things have to be. How will I feel after killing one of my own? I’ll dirty my own hands to find out,” Mephisto said with a smile as he spouted incomprehensible logic. He then began to cry.

The monster mercilessly suffocated Lydia as he sobbed with a smile—and just as he was about to break her...

“You’re not taking anyone’s life. Not on my watch,” someone cried out, resolute.

Mephisto’s raised left arm flew through the air as it was sliced off. The invisible power holding Lydia disappeared, and she dropped to the ground. Seconds later, Varvatos pierced the puppet master in the chest.

“Oh dear. Disrupting our daddy-daughter bonding time? How naughty you are.”

Although his heart had been pierced, and fresh blood now dripped from his mouth, Mephisto broke into a sweet smile and looked around him.

“Everyone else is waiting ever so patiently. Sometimes I’d appreciate it if you read the room a bit more, honey.”

“Shut up, you twisted fool.”

Varvatos didn’t want to look at him for a second more. He poured all his magic into his sword—

“Our deal is off. Get lost. You’ve plagued me long enough.”

A moment later, Mephisto exploded from the inside out. Chunks of his corpse flew high into the sky.

Normally, this would spell anyone’s end. But Mephisto was an Outer One, which was why a torn section of his head smiled and answered with glee.

“Ha-ha. This is how it should be between us. Perhaps I should commemorate our healed relationship with a parting gift.”

Moments later, the chunks of gore dissolved into black particles and began to pour like rain over both armies.

““Like I’d let you!””

At the same time, Varvatos and Lydia cast protective magic on each other’s forces. He constructed a golden wall over her comrades, while she formed a silver one over his. In the end, Mephisto’s black rain disappeared without killing anyone.

Upon confirming this, Varvatos healed Lydia’s wounds with magic. She looked at him as he did so.

“Not bad.”

“I could say the same for you.”

They smiled at each other, and Varvatos thought:

*If this person is with me...if she's by my side...I can probably hold on until the very end.*

*No more wavering. No more caving under my fear of loss. We could keep walking forward, no matter how far.*

Varvatos pressed on, because he was sure of this.

“Now that I’ve betrayed him, I can’t guarantee my own safety. That’s why...I’ll need friends. Ones I can trust above all else.”

Varvatos looked at Lydia and made an offer.

“You appear to be in the market for an ally... Would you be willing to join forces with someone as weak as me?”

Lydia gave a good-natured smile and nodded. “That’s always been the plan. It’s the whole reason I fought you... There were a few twists and turns, but I’d say everything worked out in the end.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Varvatos agreed. He took a step toward Lydia.

They shook hands to illustrate this new relationship to the vassals and soldiers.

The reactions were mixed. Some were confused. Some were relieved. Others were agitated. As he listened to them, Varvatos gave Lydia a soft smile.

“Nice working with you, comrade.”

And with this, the matter would come to a close and leave a tale to be told for generations.

However, Lydia scowled at this and had more to say.

“Huh? ‘Comrade’? What? Show some respect and call me Big Sis Lydie or something.”

“...What?”

“Big Bro Lydie works, too.”

“...Come again?”

A dark cloud slowly descended upon their peaceful comradery, and Varvatos fought back.

“Why would I ever call you that?”

“Ain’t it obvious? You’re weaker. Why should a wimp who needs his hand held every step of the way talk to me like an equal? Besides, ain’t this ‘comrade’ stuff kinda weird? We just agreed that the loser’s army would merge with the winner’s, and we both know how *that’ll* turn out, right? Which means you’re not an ally but a hench— Gwagh?!”

Her words were cut off as Varvatos sunk a punch to her solar plexus. He stared down at her and smiled as she struggled to catch her breath. It was rather warlike.

“Oh? Can you not dodge even a simple surprise attack, *Big Sis Lydie*?”

“...Ha-ha. It’s your funeral.”

Then...

“You’re going down!”

“I’ll carve my true power right into your body!”

The two began fighting like children.

“*Big Sis Lydie*? Yeah, right! *Big Bro* is way better for a sick, horny demoness like you!”

“What’d you say?! Who’s the real pervert here?! Ain’t you the one hitting on every older chick in town?!”

“D-dammit! You don’t have to share it with the world!”

“Heeeey! Listen up! This guy goes into town every night and flirts with the middle-aged ladies! He always gets rejected and throws himself a pity party! Could someone pleaaaase help a poor virgin out and introduce him to a sexy lady?”

“Agh, shut up! Shut up, shut up! I didn’t wanna flirt with anyone! I only did it ’cause you made me drink and egged me on!”

“Hmm, I wooodonder! Are you sure you weren’t into it?! How else could you use those pickup lines?! I still can’t believe you’d tell a girl you just met ‘*Your nip—*’”

“SHUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUT UPPPPPPPPPPPP!!!”

Varvatos put Lydia in a headlock and covered her mouth. As the shameful squabble continued, the vassals representing each side gave wry smiles.

“Lydie really doesn’t know how to grow up.”

“Yeah, but that’s part of her charm.”

Lydia’s entire army shrugged in exasperation.

“That woman certainly has transformed His Majesty. I will welcome her if such change is for the better, but I will revisit the matter if it is not.”

“...I haven’t seen him this relaxed in a long time anyway. I’d say it’s a good thing for now.”

Rivelg was cautious, and Olivia had on a somewhat lonely smile.

And thus, the two met and united their armies.

The man who would one day be called the Demon Lord and be fearfully revered by all...and the woman who would one day be called the Champion and be loved by all...joined hands and set off down the right path.

This is yet a prelude of two former nobodies.

A prelude to their destruction—

## AFTERWORD

“I’m going to let you say ‘There’s no way’ three times... No more. No less. Got it?”

“...Huh? What are we talking about, Editor?”

“So I was hoping you’d write a short story—”

“There’s no way!”

“It’s a short story for *Dragon Magazine*. We need it to look like—”

“There’s no way!!”

“And I’d like to continue the series for at least a year—”

“There’s no waaaaay!!!”

...That was what started this collection of short stories. Where there’s a will, there’s a way, I guess. Somehow, I’ve managed to keep it afloat for a year now. The short stories in this volume were originally published in *Dragon Magazine*, but I added some flair to them and rewrote sections to create a midlength novel.

I know it’s cliché for me to explain each chapter here, but please humor me.

- Chapter 1: The Demon Lord’s Rescue Log: Courage Turned Cowardice

I wanted to write something different from the usual fare, which gave birth to this dark fantasy. The main series is written in first person from Ard’s point of view, but this short story incorporates third person. There’s not much comedic relief here... I wrote this to fulfill my personal tastes.

- Chapter 2: Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: The Tale of a God Slayer

Unlike Chapter 1, this shifts the focus back to the Demon Lord. I think I’d like to delve more into the Old Gods elsewhere.

I’ve always wanted to write twin heroines, so I took the chance when I got it, and I’m very happy about that... I’m not sure if I successfully made

them cute or not, but let's not talk about that here.

- Chapter 3: Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: Of Intimacy and Salvation

All about parent-child relationships. You might hear that a child can never truly know the depth of a parent's love, and the girl is a perfect example of that. The parents really could have been more direct...but family dynamics are tough.

- Chapter 4: Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: Heart Turned Mind

*I'm out of ideas. I don't know what to write...and I can't do this anymore. Maybe no one will notice if I added some random idea that popped into my mind.*

...And then my editor gave me the go-ahead.

It's a scenario where the characters take on the appearance of the opposite sex, but I wonder if I pushed that aspect enough. I'd love to write a story where Ard Meteor, a maiden, falls hard for a hypermasculine Ireena...

- Chapter 5: Prelude of the Endangered

This was a new story for the novella. I wanted to include a piece that took place in the ancient past, and I'm thrilled that I got to write it. For those of you who have read the main series and want me to do more, feel free to let me know on Twitter. If I get good feedback from the readers, I'll write two or three more follow-up chapters that take place in ancient times.

—Last are my thanks and apologies.

First, I'd like to give a great big "thank you" to my illustrator Sao Mizuno, my editor, the designers, and everyone else who contributes to the main series. I'd also like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who picked up this book. I hope we meet again in the next volume.

Until then.

*Myojin Katou*

The Greatest  
Demon  
Lord  IS REBORN  
AS A  
TYPICAL  
NOBODY  
Side Story  
 The Wonderful Life  
of a Typical Nobody

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**FIRST APPEARANCE**

“The Demon Lord’s Rescue Log: Courage Turned Cowardice”  
*Dragon Magazine*, January 2019

“Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: The Tale of a God Slayer”  
*Dragon Magazine*, March 2019

“Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: Of Intimacy and Salvation”  
*Dragon Magazine*, May 2019

“Dues to the Demon Lord Reborn: Heart Turned Mind”  
*Dragon Magazine*, July 2019

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